

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PERPLEXITY.

THE cry of distress, sharp and piercing, resounding at midnight through the peaceable house of the Reverend Mr. Connell, startled its inmates to terror. In a minute all was confusion. There were sounds of shoeless feet running hurriedly across bed-rooms, of doors opening, of vague questions, addressed apparently to the air.

Mrs. Connell, being up and dressed, came forth from Miss Cleare's room at once. Alice followed her, pale and uncertain. The minister, hardly awake yet and very much alarmed, was coming out of his chamber, settling himself into his old grey dressing-gown. Evelyn Agate appeared in a white wrapper. Mrs. Raven came behind with a white face. The two maid-servants stood on the attic stairs, quaking and quivering.

"Where is Mrs. Connell?" called out the minister, in alarm. "What cry is that?"

"I am here, James," she answered. "I have been sitting all the while with Miss Cleare, never thinking how late it was. Who was it that shrieked? What is the matter? What did they see?"

"See!" cried Mr. Connell, thinking the word a curious one to use. "Is everybody here?"

"Where is Louisa?" exclaimed the mother, missing her daughter and hastily moving towards the door of her chamber. But Louisa's voice was instantly heard in reply. "I am coming out as fast as I can, mamma. What is the matter?"

A similar question, with divers sounds of hasty movements, and somewhat stormy exclamations, came from the little room, which, in the crowded state of the house, Philip and Percy were occupying together. In almost less than a moment, they were on the scene. And then Frank appeared, looking not fully awake yet.

"Who screamed? Who shrieked?" were the words in everybody's mouth. Questions easier asked than answered.

"We must go through the house from top to bottom," said Mrs. Connell. She could not keep a certain uneasiness out of her tone.

"There are no burglars in it, I suppose," cried her husband, hastily. "Did you hear anything—save the cry, Millicent?"

"Nothing but the cry," she replied.

"And what did you suppose there was for anybody to *see*?" pursued the minister.

"Better go through the house," she answered. "Lose no time. Any of you not well wrapped up must get a shawl," added the careful mother.

Philip turned into his room and brought out a box of matches, with which he re-lit the gas at every burner they passed. "Let us have plenty of light on the subject, at any rate," said he.

Everything in the drawing-room lay exactly as they had left it an hour before, but the apartment had the strange ghastliness and chill common to familiar places unexpectedly entered at midnight.

"Are the outer doors fast?" asked Mrs. Connell. And Philip and Percy went together to ascertain, while she herself lifted aside the curtains and tried the bolts of the windows: which were quite secure. Half-instinctively she threw the curtains wide, as if she did not want to see more of the garden than the rest could. There it lay, empty and yellow in the moonlight. "Do you see anyone loitering there?" she asked.

"Hardly likely, mother," spoke Philip, who had just got back from looking to the doors.

"Well, Philip, somebody was in the garden at the time of the scream—or the moment before it," answered his mother.

"Eh, what's that?" cried the minister. "Somebody in the garden?"

"Midnight owls who had stolen in to have a peep at the trees," lightly suggested Philip, attaching no importance to what his mother had said.

"And the scream was within the house, I am quite sure," cried Louisa.

"Stay a bit—how you children talk!" reproved their father. "The scream was in the house, that is certain. The question is, did any one of you scream?"—looking round generally.

But Mr. Connell got no assenting answer. "Well, then," he rejoined, "if it was none of us that screamed, some one must be in the house that we know nothing of."

"Were any of you awake—besides myself and Miss Cleare?" asked Mrs. Connell, glancing around at the group. "Were you, Mrs. Raven?" she quickly continued, seeing what had escaped her notice before, that her sister-in-law had appeared in unruffled order, in the same secure black robe of rich silk and crape which she had worn during the evening.

"I was quite awake," replied Mrs. Raven. "I had sat up

writing a letter to Leonard. The house was quite still, and I had no idea anybody in it was up but myself."

Mrs. Raven spoke calmly, but her face was ghastly pale, and her hands were visibly trembling.

"That shriek must have startled you terribly, I fear," said Mrs. Connell, her kind heart melting towards her sister-in-law as she thought of the lonely widow, sitting up at midnight, writing to her son.

"Yes, it did. I—what is that?"

The little party started simultaneously, and drew nearer to one another. Some stealthy movement was taking place in the hall. It proved to be the frightened servants.

"Come in, come in," called out their master. "It was not either of you who screamed, I suppose?"

"Law, sir, no," said the cook, "'twasn't neither of us—why my heart's in my mouth yet, sir. It was just a yell, sir."

"Three screams, one fast upon the other," gasped the housemaid. "The last one was more like the other two dying away, sir."

"We are losing time," said Philip. "We had better go through the house. Not you, father; you stay here—to protect the ladies, you know," he added, half laughing. "Come along, Frank."

Percy followed them, and they began their search systematically, looking not only into rooms and closets and cupboards, but into coal-boxes and warming pans. Philip was making a half joke of it.

"We shan't find anybody, Frank," said he, confidentially.

"I hardly know what it is we are looking for," Frank answered. "Midnight robbers don't scream to betray their presence. I take it for granted there was a scream—and a pretty shrill one: but it could not come from them."

Philip turned to look at him. "Did you not hear it?" he asked.

"I heard you all running about and crying out; that was what awakened me: I heard nothing more. Of course I knew something must be wrong. At first I thought the house was on fire."

"It was a mighty squeal," said Percy. "You must be a sound sleeper, Frank."

"Yes, a squeal—a scream—a shriek—a yell—three yells," nodded Philip. "We shan't find anything, Frank, I tell you; but we must look everywhere, all the same."

"That of course. What was the shriek?" debated Frank. "Who made it? One of the ladies, I shouldn't wonder." And Philip nodded emphatically.

"We are not going to have any mysterious story hanging about this house," said the young barrister. "It was an investment of my father's; and you know, as Miss Agate says, tragedy isn't good for house property. Ten years hence, if we wanted to sell it, this story of a dreadful shriek at midnight, that could not be accounted for might rise up and lessen its value. We must sift it out, Frank."

"But if it can't be sifted?" debated Frank.

"It can. Don't tell me. A thing like that happening in a well-ordered house must have an explanation—if you can only get at it. Perhaps one of the two girls dreamt she saw the 'Oriental Mystery,' and shrieked out in fright.—And here we are at the end of our search; this is the last room—housemaid's pantry, I believe they call it—and nothing has been found."

The party in the drawing-room, who had been straining their ears to follow the sound of the young men's footsteps, going to and fro and up and down, received them back with a faint feeling of disappointment. Non-success did not bring re-assurance. As long as the cause of the shriek remained unknown, the shriek might be heard again.

"Have you searched thoroughly?" began the minister.

"Thoroughly," replied his son Philip; "from garret to basement. There's not a yard of space that we've not looked into. I can answer for it, father, that no person whatever is in the house but ourselves."

Knowing that nobody would care to go to bed until the excitement should in a degree have passed off and the matter been talked over, Mrs. Connell suggested they should all have some coffee, and the two servants were sent into the kitchen to blow up the fire and boil the kettle.

"That's mother all over, taking care of us all," laughed Philip. "If a ghost came in sight, mother could only order it a hot bath, lest it should have taken cold in its night wanderings."

"Be serious, you young people," said their father; "you would like to turn everything into ridicule. This matter must be cleared up, if it can be. What was that you said, Milicent, about seeing somebody in the garden?"

"I had been talking with Miss Cleare, and letting the time run on unheeded, as I told you," replied Mrs. Connell. "When the clock struck twelve, I started up, saying I did not know what you would think had become of me. Miss Cleare opened the window curtains; she exclaimed what a lovely night it was, and I stood by her side for a minute, looking out. All at once, we both saw the figure of a man, coming across the lawn from the shrubs by the railings. He appeared to be making straight for the house. Suddenly he seemed to look up—not, I think, at our window, though I can't be sure—halt for the briefest possible moment, turn back and disappear amidst the shrubs. And before he was quite out of sight we heard that startling scream."

"Well now, mother, what was the man like?" asked Philip. "Was it anyone you knew? Should you recognise him again?"

"No," replied Mrs. Connell, "it was not anyone I knew. I might recognise the figure again, and probably should: but in calling it a man, Philip, I speak from supposition only that it was one. It was enveloped in some covering, a dark cloak I think, from head to foot."

Frank lifted his head. "Why," he exclaimed, "that is just the

description Miss Cleare gave of the figure she saw that night in the Raven lanes!"

"And Miss Cleare thinks this is the same figure she saw then."

Mrs. Connell's words fell upon the room as an electric shock. Mrs. Raven, sitting apart, pale and silent, lifted her face with a start, and dropped it again.

Philip was the first to find tongue. "*No!*" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, Philip," said his mother. "Miss Cleare recognised the figure with a start; I could feel that, as she caught hold of me. It was the same figure which had frightened her in the Ravenstoke lanes, she whispered. The evening she met you, you know, Frank. You were talking of it in the drawing-room to-night."

Louisa caught sight of her aunt's face; and it startled her. "Dear Mrs. Raven! how pale you are! Ought you to sit up to be troubled by all this? Shall I go with you to your room?"

Louisa's words recalled Evelyn Agate to the duties of her own place. She sprang up and approached her mistress.

But Mrs. Raven put them all aside. She was usually pale, she said, with a would-be careless smile; she thought they had all been a little startled. But certainly she would not go to her room. She was far too much interested: and she believed most people liked mysteries. And so Evelyn slipped down on the footstool beside her, and sat there, holding her hand. With her white robe relieved against Mrs. Raven's sombre gown, and Frank leaning on the back of his mother's chair, the group would have made a pretty tableau. Evelyn was aware of this. She was sure to be aware of a pretty tableau in which she played a striking part.

"Well," said Philip, "how did you recognise this figure, Miss Cleare?"

"Only by the cloak and hat," she answered. "On neither occasion have I seen anything of the face, except its whiteness. In the moonlight it looked like that of the dead. But it had a strange red mark at the side. I can't say what it is, exactly."

"I thought no face was to be seen!" exclaimed Philip.

"Yes, just a glimpse of it both times; its colour, not its features. I have never seen anything as white in my life as it looked each time in the full moonlight. It was raised for a moment to-night, just as the figure turned: and then it held out its right hand clutched, and shook it with a threatening gesture."

"And, before the figure disappeared, you and my mother heard the scream. Did you think that scream came from a man's voice or a woman's?"

"I could not tell," replied Alice.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Connell. "It only seemed a cry of awful pain."

"Of terror and despair; as it seemed to me," observed Alice Cleare, gently. "I am not sure but at the moment I caught up

the impression that it must be a woman's voice. A man's would hardly have been so shrill."

"I have known men's voices grow shrill in terror," remarked Philip. "Aunt Raven, what did it seem like to you?"

"It was just a cry," she answered, coughing slightly. "I got no impression concerning it."

"It was like the yell of the banshees we read about in Irish story books," said Louisa. Her brother looked at her; knowing about the events of yesterday, he understood why supernatural imagery came up so readily.

"It was like somebody being murdered," said Evelyn.

"I am like Mrs. Raven," observed the minister. "I was aware only of a sudden cry ringing through my doze. The question is—whether anyone, sleeping front, saw this figure on the grass, felt alarmed at it, and so gave the scream. I suppose you are sure it was neither you nor Miss Cleare?"—to his wife.

"That it was not, James. I wish I could say it had been."

"Well—who else of us occupies front rooms?"

"Mrs. Raven; Louisa; Miss Agate; Philip and Percy."

"And now, who amongst you looked out to see this figure?" demanded Mr. Connell. No one spoke.

"You sat at the table in the middle of the room, writing your letter—with the curtains drawn," said Mrs. Connell, turning to Mrs. Raven: who nodded in reply.

"I was in bed," put in Louisa.

"So was I," added Evelyn.

"And I'm sure we were," said Percy, "and fast asleep, too."

"Ah, I see we shall have to fall back upon mother and Miss Cleare," remarked Philip, not choosing to confess to the baffled feeling that seemed to be setting in. "They do admit to have seen the mysterious visitant, and to have been alarmed at it. Can you be *quite* sure, mother, that the scream was not given by Miss Cleare or yourself? Remember, you were alarmed and off your guard: nothing could be more natural than to cry out."

"I am not a screaming woman," said Mrs. Connell, a little piqued, for she really believed Philip was putting the questions seriously. "And I am sure Miss Cleare is not, either."

"So," remarked Philip, "it seems that we are just where we were. I shall begin to think there was no cry at all. You had all of you gone up to your bed-rooms nervous; that's what it was. As to the figure, we had been talking of that figure, you know. So what more easy than to have imagined you saw it, and to have been alarmed accordingly? Nothing is so deceptive as moonlight."

"There was something to alarm us at any rate," retorted Mrs. Connell. "The man *was* in the garden—for a man I have no doubt it was. Though you seem to wish to take away our ears and our common sense, Philip, I suppose we may keep our eyes."

"Well," admitted Philip, "there's more satisfaction in having to deal with a man than a ghost, so it is well you feel no doubt upon that point, mother. I thought I heard it said to-night—by Frank, was it?—that the figure given to haunt the precincts of Ravenstoke in a dark cloak was supposed to be a ghost, and not a man. Certainly one cannot at present see what the Ravenstoke ghost should want at Colburn——"

"Don't joke, Philip," cried Mrs. Raven, in a low, weary voice. "It is not a subject for it."

Philip was checked at once. He begged Mrs. Raven's pardon, and said mentally that he ought to have remembered she was present. "But I wonder," he added to himself, as an afterthought, "what it is in this business that is especially scaring her. She looks as white as the ghost could look; and so she did when they were talking in the drawing-room to-night of the figure that walks in the Raven lanes."

The coffee which had been ordered now came in—perhaps to some of them as a welcome interruption. As Mr. Connell slowly stirred that in his cup round and round to cool it,—for to drink hot tea or coffee always made his voice hoarse—he began turning about in his mind how he could best set about the solving of this mystery.

"We are all naturally incredulous of anybody's seeing or hearing more than we do ourselves," remarked Philip, calmly. "And as the rest of us did not see this phenomenon on the shadowy lawn, only the mother and Miss Cleare—why, there it is."

He was crossing the room as he spoke, after putting down his empty coffee-cup. Mr. Connell pinned him by the arm.

"Philip," he said, in a low, grave tone, "what reason have you for persisting in this semi-satire? Have any of you young men been playing a joke, by giving vent to the cry yourselves?"

"No, father," earnestly spoke Philip, who knew he must not trifle with the minister. "We know absolutely nothing about it, any more than you know. I only thought to throw a less grave face upon it by way of re-assurance."

The coffee had done wonders in the way of renovation, and the whole party was astir now; Mrs. Connell ironically remarking, "I'm sure nobody can be afraid to go to bed, after Philip has set our nerves so entirely at rest."

Miss Cleare was the first to go back to her own room. She said so little, that Philip wondered if she was really vexed; and he noticed his aunt watching her movements with deep interest, and an expression of countenance which he felt had some meaning beyond his understanding.

Mrs. Raven repudiated all suggestions that she might be the better for a companion in her chamber. She did not even seem grateful for the offer, though she did not say she was not frightened, but spoke with a coldness which again recalled past years to Frank's memory. "I own I prefer to be alone."

Louisa and Evelyn decided to pass the rest of the night together. They each felt that after this midnight mystery, it would be a relief to speak with somebody who had shared in the adventures of the preceding day. They went upstairs with Mrs. Raven, assuring her that in their room, next hers, they must hear every sound which could possibly reach her ears, any call she might make.

There was a spice of scorn in the pale smile she turned upon them before she closed her door.

To her, Philip's attempted glib explanation of certain facts, known only to herself, invested those facts with their worst horror.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TWO FORTUNES.

THE two girls slept little that night. Louisa found relief from her over-wrought condition in a rush of confidences, of which Evelyn was chosen to be the recipient, only because she had been the partner—indeed, the originator—of yesterday's exploit. Louisa Connell was not attracted to Evelyn: indeed, she was already beginning to feel a peculiar mistrust of her. But, then, to whom else could she speak? Not to her mother. Not to Miss Cleare. It almost frightened her to feel how this stranger suddenly stood within a circle from which her own familiar, fondly-loved parent, and a girl whose character she had learned implicitly to trust were shut out.

If only she could tell *them* of that clandestine expedition to the Cave! In more than one remark to Evelyn she implied this longing, though something about Evelyn made her shrink from fully expressing it. She felt that Evelyn Agate despised her already, and that she could only despise her more if she knew that she craved to reveal the secret they had agreed to keep.

In reality, Evelyn was by no means averse to its being told. She wanted the witch's message to reach Frank's ears, and if this could not be done without the others hearing, well, then, let them hear! She had boundless faith in her own powers of self-justification and bewitchment; she was sure that she could be very graceful in disgrace. But she was not going to encourage Louisa to make public revelations. Nobody should be able to recollect afterwards that she had stirred one finger towards bringing Frank and this strange Sybil together.

"I do wish I had not gone near that woman," moaned Louisa on her pillow. "This sort of nonsense has an effect upon one's nerves, and some of the things she said to me were depressing."

"If you feel they are nonsense, it is very weak to be troubled by them," replied Evelyn.

"You heard all she said," Louisa went on, "and how she talked

about glory and nations and—— that sort of thing. I don't care one bit about glory, and I don't want to have anything to do with nations! I never even cared much for history. I want a quiet life, and peace and comfort."

"I should have liked a grand, romantic fortune like that," said Evelyn. "All she told me was only what might be expected."

"And yet, if she had followed our looks only," Louisa sighed, "I'm sure she ought to have given you the heroine's part. Whenever we played at charades at school, I was always an old woman in a white cap. The crowns and coronets did not suit my style, and everybody burst out laughing if I put them on."

"But what makes you think of crowns and coronets?" "I didn't hear her mention them."

"No," said Louisa, "but you heard her talk about a nation shouting. If it means anything, it means that Marco Learli is somebody more than he seems. He once hinted as much to my mother."

"And has he never put any confidence in you?" asked Evelyn. "Did you not even ask him what he meant by his words to Mrs. Connell?"

Louisa's face was burning in the kindly darkness. "He said to me the first time we met, when we were not sure ever to meet again," she whispered, "that perhaps some day I should see his name in the public papers and hear people talking about him. Those were his words; I never forgot them; for at the time he looked so sad and ill, and his eyes had such a strange, far-away expression, that I was terribly afraid he might be thinking of——of suicide."

Louisa, repeating the last word in a dread, timid whisper, expected Evelyn to be altogether thrilled. But Evelyn laughed.

"That would not have made much sensation," she observed. "It is only what the world might think quite natural in a disappointed, home-sick foreigner. Foreigners do not regard these points as we do. But it is certainly singular when the Italian's modest words get this strange re-statement in a prophetic flourish of the witch-woman's. I wish you joy of your prince in disguise, Miss Connell."

"I don't want him to be a prince in disguise," returned Louisa.

Louisa could not rest. She could not help connecting the visit of yesterday with the terror of this night, and she trembled for what they had done.

"I think we ought to tell Frank Raven about our visit and what was said," she murmured. "You see, Miss Agate, we have begun to mix ourselves up with this woman, and there's nothing so dangerous or foolish in most things as leaving off in the middle. We had better go through to the end, and then be more careful in future."

"Do as you like; you are his cousin; it is for you to tell him," said Evelyn, curtly, craftily suppressing her delight.

"I'll speak to Philip about it again to-morrow," said Louisa, "and hear what he says."

Evelyn gave a smile of disdain. "Were I as sure as you are that it ought to be done, I would not beat about the bush: I would do it," she remarked.

But Louisa said no more. She felt altogether weak and contemptible in comparison with this strong-minded young woman.

So Miss Evelyn Agate got leisure for quiet meditation. The figure in the garden to-night must be certainly identical with the ghost of Ravenscourt that walked in the moonlight,—the ghost of whose baneful influence on the neighbourhood the Ravenstoke stationer had spoken,—the ghost which Alice Cleare and herself had both seen at Ravenstoke, and almost on the same spot. What could be the meaning of its appearance at Colburn? Had it followed any one of them? Herself?—or Mrs. Raven?—or Frank?—or even Alice Cleare? Nay, not Alice: that idea was too ridiculous!

Suddenly, all in a moment, Evelyn's heart gave a great leap. Its pulses stood still, and then bounded tumultuously onwards, as a thought which (strange, perhaps, to say) had never struck her before, that her own birthday and Frank's were the same! Could it be that she was the daughter of the house of Ravenscourt?—could it be *possible* that she was Mrs. Raven's child, and that this second son of the family was but a changeling, a stranger and usurper?

But the very fact of her own newly-formed intimate relation with Ravenscourt only made this idea more incredible to Evelyn. For had not those relations been formed in the most conventional manner—formed simply by her own answer to an advertisement in a public print? Evelyn's was not a mind predisposed to believe in providential coincidence.

Yet she harped upon the fancy: that she might be Miss Evelyn Raven. Imagination begun to flutter its wings. The witch must have indicated Frank in the persistent but indifferent lover—surely, yes! And if he became aware of his precarious position, and of how a marriage with her might assure it for ever without pain or scandal, that would both explain and justify a rather loveless suit. It was the course human nature would necessarily take, and she would certainly not blame it. But she did not allow herself to believe that her fancies were facts: she was too practical.

Stay!—There was Marco Learli again; and all the indefinite and wonderful possibilities she saw foreshadowed in *his* future. The desert of her life had suddenly broken up into enchanting prospects. Mirages they might be: but then, again, they might not. And in the meantime, though the horizon had so brightened, the ground remained as solid as ever under her feet, and she must be wary and cautious. For no vague hope of pushing her fortunes, for no wild dream, even of empire, would she risk her present snug resting-place at Ravenscourt.

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," mused the girl, as she lay silently, quite unheeding Louisa's ill-suppressed sighs. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

She turned round and composed herself to sleep. Wakefulness destroyed good looks, and confused the brain. She did not feel excited by these imaginings. If Frank were really a changeling, who brought him to the Court, and where did he come from? Somebody must have lost him. Ha!—and she started at the sudden thought—there was the Agates' baby boy! That was lost—or stolen. Could that boy be Frank? Dear, dear! if Aunt Gertrude got a suspicion of all this, how she would work to unfathom the mystery, and not leave a stone unturned! But Aunt Gertrude's suspicions must not be roused. That might only end in unsettling Evelyn's present position, without in the least improving her future. Thus Evelyn's fancy went toying with her own life and the lives and hearts of those who stood nearest her; but she did not find the game too exciting, for she fell asleep in the middle of it.

Next morning, she remembered her own ideas almost as if they had come to her in a dream. She was Mrs. Raven's companion; neither more nor less. But there are some dreams which we do not readily forget.

Of course, the first topic of conversation at the breakfast table was the alarm of the preceding night. The only one of the party who looked any the worse for the disturbance was Mrs. Raven. She owned she had never closed her eyes, but added that sleeplessness was no uncommon condition with her now. There was a fall in her voice, as she said that, which went to Frank's heart.

"Did you notice any people beside yourselves at the Cave yesterday?" suddenly asked Mrs. Connell. "Loose characters do hang about there sometimes."

Louisa's face flushed vividly. But Evelyn's reply was prompt.

"We saw nobody except our own party. At least I did not. Did you?"—and she turned towards the two others.

Louisa bent her head to stir the sugar in her cup. Philip looked Evelyn full in the face.

"Our own party!" he repeated. "I scarcely saw even it at the Cave. There was not room for us all inside together."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Connell. "There are many hours in a day, and I dare say most people visit that place in the afternoon. Besides, these sensational advertisements often conceal meanings quite different from what appears on their surface."

"Why, mother," exclaimed Philip, "what are you talking of? 'What has the Cave to do with sensational advertisements?'"

"Only this, Philip: there is such an advertisement in to-day's paper, purporting to have some connection with a yesterday's visitor at the Cave."

"Dear me!" rejoined Philip, feeling rather conscious. "What may that be?"

"Nothing very interesting on the surface of it," answered his mother, "but, as I say, the true meaning may be hidden. Listen:

"THE CAVE: Yesterday: Is the message delivered? Beware!"

Louisa was trembling from head to foot. She dared not lift her eyes either to Evelyn's face or Philip's. A buzzing sound rang in her ears; through which she heard Evelyn take up the conversation, in her specially quiet, deliberate manner, and speak to Philip.

"There was that woman who passed us; after we came out of the Cave. She looked like a character—as if she had a history of her own."

Louisa had to control herself during breakfast. Afterwards she drew Philip to what was called the housekeeper's room, a little place that had been her own peculiar sanctum since she took the house-keeping and other domestic duties off her mother's hands. There she gave way completely, and sobbed aloud.

"Philip, I'm frightened to death; I can't bear it any longer. And I won't have that Miss Agate crowing over me, as I know she *is*. And Frank ought to get that message! It is for him to choose his own course afterwards: not for us to keep him in the dark."

Philip was thoughtful. For one thing, he could not understand his sister's panic. He knew Evelyn Agate better than Louisa did, and probably had even a lower and yet truer estimate of her worth, or worthlessness. But Philip was no sage: only a worldly-wise young man, who had his wits about him. He was quite willing that Frank should receive the message that the witch had sent. In truth his own curiosity was aroused, not only about that, but about these other curious things that were happening.

Philip wanted to know more. Three questions were lying upon his mind. To wit: Whether that woman was a mere clever impostor, scenting her track as she went, and so, like a hound liable to be defeated by a false trail? Whether she was a dangerous adventuress, with objects of her own in view? Or, whether there lay, behind her, any mystery passing present comprehension, and linking her and her retrospects and prophecies with the strange being his mother and Alice Cleare had seen in the garden?

"It would never do to have a town's talk made over anything connected with our sober house," mentally repeated Philip. But the pacification of Louisa was the duty of the present moment. How easily women could get flurried! Philip could not see why she should be so agitated: could not gather much reason for it from her disconnected words. The foolish girl seemed to imagine that because she had had her fortune told, she might be followed by evil and disturbing influences for the remainder of her days.

"Well, Louie," he said, aloud, "we'll tell Frank. It does not necessarily follow that papa and mamma need be told. We might

even leave Miss Evelyn Agate to find out that we haven't set much store by the secret—that we would as lief tell it as not."

But Louisa still refused to be comforted.

"What a silly girl you are! I dare say Frank's visit will bring us no end of mystification and fun. Afraid of not telling mamma, you say! Oh, come, it's no such great crime that we have committed. I'll take it all upon myself—there! They can't scold us much."

"I hardly know why I should feel like this, Philip."

"I'm sure I don't. I should not be surprised if the father goes to see the Oriental lady himself: in the ordinary course of ministerial duty and scientific inquiry, you know. Cheer up, child."

"Frank *must* go, Philip."

"Of course. And if he's afraid to visit the witch alone, I'll go with him," laughed Philip; "and if she won't let me in to hear her revelations, I'll wait at the door, and get them all hot when he comes out."

Louisa's frightened face settled down into a faint smile. She was re-assured as easily as she was flurried. But she did not tell Philip that her chief trouble was connected with the young Italian, Marco Learli.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FOREIGN TONGUE.

FRANK RAVEN was in his own room, writing a letter to Leonard. During their brief absences from each other, the brothers had never corresponded. Frank made a mental note that this was the first letter which had ever passed between them. He would not have written now, but that he really wanted to know whether Leonard could find any clue to the identity of the figure Miss Cleare had seen in Ash Lane at Ravenscourt. Leonard was not a man to whom it would have been very easy to tell such a story, while Miss Cleare only had seen it—a strange young lady, straying alone in lonely places. But the case was altered now; and Frank had resolved to leave no stone unturned to get at the bottom of the mystery. He had no doubt that Mrs. Connell and Miss Cleare had seen a becloaked man in the garden; he had not a shadow of doubt, either, that Miss Cleare had had good reason for believing that this figure was the one she had been frightened by in the Raven Lanes. He had as little doubt that the shriek, or cry, which had rung through the house, must have come from some one who had also seen this figure on the grass-plat, and been frightened by it. Could it have been his mother? Anyway, Frank thought it was his duty to endeavour to unravel the problem.

Directly he appeared on the stairs—his letter, finished, in his hand—Philip pounced on him, and led him to the housekeeper's room, where Louisa still lingered. They, the three cousins, could be tolerably secure here of an undisturbed chat.

Louisa would have told the story, spasmodically, of their visit to the Cave, beginning with asseverations of her own repentance, but Philip speedily took the relation upon himself.

"You remember our talking over the 'Oriental Mystery,' Frank? There was enough said about it, especially by Percy. Well, do you know, old boy, after all our ridicule, some of us went to see her yesterday."

Frank laughed. He supposed they had gone in pure fun. Philip was glad of that laugh, and hastened to emphasise the mood from which it rose.

"Now, don't make sport of us, young man," he said, with mock deprecation. "You see, the girls had set their hearts on it; and so——"

Louisa could not endure this. "I'm sure I didn't," she burst out. "Frank knows it was not my idea, to begin with; and, after thinking over it, and hearing what Marco Learli and Alice Cleare said, I would not have gone near her on any account, but for that Miss Evelyn Agate."

Louisa was throwing overboard all dreams of future amity with Evelyn. Something in the companion's tone, during the later confidences of the past night, had produced such an impression on Miss Connell, that had Evelyn even made her a free offer of spending all the rest of her visit in teaching that Italian language which she so much coveted, the offer would have been spurned.

"Oh, you were glad enough to go," said Philip, vexed with her that she did not take up his cue of treating the whole thing as a joke. "And quite naturally, too. You don't have too much excitement in Colburn."

"I'm not too sure of that," smiled Frank. "My twenty years of Raven life had never introduced me to such a drama as we had here last night."

"Oh, come, come," said Philip; "it was a Raven ghost that disturbed us, at any rate. We don't keep a ghost here, Frank; we are too humble."

"Perhaps that is why you went to a witch," quoth Frank.

"Just so," assented Philip. "Common folks must console themselves somehow. And even the witch wouldn't have anything to say to me!"

"No?"

"No. And the most sensible thing she said to the girls was, that she knew of *your* existence, Frank; that she wanted to see you very much; that she could speak to you concerning a secret matter, which nobody knows anything of but you and herself; imparting altogether, I think, a general impression that you would 'hear of something to your advantage.'"

Philip's tone and manner were light enough, but he was watching Frank narrowly. There are few men whose faces would not change

a little to hear that something they believed to be a secret was open to the eyes of some unexpected and unknown person. Frank only blushed vividly. He was aware of but one secret; it was connected with Alice Cleare; and his heart had not yet whispered of it surely to himself.

"Do go," said Philip, airily. "It will be fun to study the way in which the old prophetess tries to make fools of people. And—Frank—did you listen to that advertisement my mother read from the paper this morning?"

"Of course I did. We all listened."

"Well, look here: we believe that advertisement was intended for your eyes, and that the 'message' mentioned is the witch's wish to see you."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, that message was all about the Cave—wasn't it?"

"Well, weren't we at the Cave yesterday?" returned Philip. "I'm sure you heard *that*, old fellow. It was there we held our several interviews with the witch."

"But does she attend at the Cave?"

"No. We got her to meet us there because we did not care to go to her lodgings; don't you see?"

Frank felt surprised. "Which of you went?"

"The two girls—Louisa here and Evelyn Agate; and I escorted them." And Philip went on to speak more in detail of what happened, and repeated the message to Frank.

"I'd go if I were you, Frank."

"*Do*," said Louisa, emphatically. "The woman does know strange things, and I can't imagine how it is possible she should, unless her knowledge is supernatural."

"But that must be nonsense," laughed Frank. "And pray, Philip, where am I to see her if I do go?"

"Oh, at her house, certainly. I will go with you. To tell you the whole truth," added Philip, "though it may take down your sense of self-importance, one of us must see her again, for we all forgot to pay her. And I have a shrewd suspicion that this accounts for the special urgency of her wish to see you. I suppose a sovereign will be enough."

At that instant Mrs. Connell's voice was heard calling from the dining-room, and Louisa had to hasten away in answer to it.

Philip saw his opportunity. He gave a sideway nod towards the door as it closed behind her. "You see how upset she is," he whispered. "You must go. I suspect that the Oriental Craft saw Louisa could be easily scared, and so gave her a dose of daggers, and omens, and cross-bones. Now see here, Frank; if you go to this woman, and are able to prove her the humbug she certainly is, you will do Louisa a true service. I am afraid the belief in all this has taken serious hold upon her nerves."

"Oh, I'd like to do what I can to serve or please anybody," said Frank, simply. "I can't promise not to burst out laughing in the lady's face. When are we to go?"

"Now," said Philip. "No time like the present."

As the two young men passed through the hall, they heard voices in the drawing-room, and Philip paused. For these were familiar Colburn voices, which he had not yet heard during his present visit to his native town.

"I must go in," he whispered to Frank. "These visitors are the Misses Beck, dear old maiden ladies, great friends of my mother's. She told me they were going away on a visit, so I may not have another chance of seeing them. Will you wait for me? or try to find Daylight Villa on your own account?"

"Oh, I will wait," said Frank. "Or, stay—I can go out on an errand of my own, and look in again for you. Where shall I find a stationer's shop?"

"The shops are in quite another direction from Daylight Villa, which is by the railway station," answered Philip. "I will direct you."

He was not sorry that Frank was disposed of. He knew that the Misses Beck were great gossips, with a furtive love for the marvellous, and that they were not at all unlikely to discuss the "Oriental Mystery," and might have so prejudiced Frank against that incomprehensible potentate as to cause him to rescind his consent: and Philip estimated the Misses Beck justly. The two old ladies exclaimed their delight at seeing him, and went into a mingling of ecstasies over his splendid prospects in London and lamentations over his "London pallor," and then relapsed into their chairs and picked up the thread of their conversation where his entrance had snapped it.

"Miranda does not see things as I see them," said the elder Miss Beck, "but I say that a woman who will take half-a-crown from such a girl as our Betsy, must have the heart of a stone. A poor parish orphan, earning her bread and eight pounds a year as a domestic servant. It's shameful!"

"My dear," expostulated the calmer Miss Miranda, "if a parish orphan goes to buy anything, she has to pay for it. What would you think of any haberdasher, if, before he would sell her a ribbon (and Betsy buys too many!) he asked her, 'Are you a parish orphan, and are you sure you can afford it?' It's exactly the same thing, Esther."

"No, it is not," dissented Miss Beck, "and I'm sure Mrs. Connell must see it as I do. This woman, if she professes to know anything, ought to have known that Betsy was a parish orphan. I don't profess to be an Oriental Mystery, or anything out of the common, but I'm sure I could see 'parish orphan' stamped all over the girl in capital letters—which is a trying thing to say of one's own servant, when one can't afford to keep a better. But if it's true, it's true."

And Miss Beck sat upright and confronted the world.

"People who are heartless enough to impose on others will not pause where their cheating is likely to be a real injury," observed Mrs. Connell. "But it seems to me that the fault was the girl's own. Why did she go?"

"Ah!" groaned Miss Beck. "You can't put old heads upon young shoulders."

From these remarks, Philip gathered that Miss Beck's maid had been consulting the witch, and had not been permitted, like his party, to escape payment. He felt soothed, somehow. The woman must be but a commonplace impostor after all. Mr. Connell spoke a few words of wisdom, half jestingly.

"Now, it's a true pleasure to hear you talk, sir," exclaimed Miss Beck; "you say exactly what I wanted to say myself. If Betsy wished to know whether the grocer's young man was a fit sweetheart for her, had she not better have come to you or Mrs. Connell?—I won't say to me or Miranda, seeing that we have no experience in such things."

At this point Philip heard the hall door opened, and guessed it was by Frank, returning. So he sprang up and bade the old ladies a hasty adieu, his very hurry giving his speech an enthusiasm and warmth which highly delighted them.

The young men went off together, Philip linking his arm through Frank's, in his wonted fashion. Philip poured out the story of Miss Beck's indignation, with mimicries of that lady's quaint manner, which kept Frank interested and amused till they were in front of Daylight Villa.

The windows of that mysterious abode were as usual closely screened—"as if it were afraid of its own sponsor," Philip observed. Everything about the place had the most neglected and sordid appearance. The door-ledges were dusty, the bell-handles dull and damp, the uneven doorstep bore tramplings of dirty footmarks.

"I wonder if the Delphic oracle was always in a mess," Philip said, after he had knocked.

The door was promptly opened. Philip had brought no note with him this morning, and he found himself involved in the difficulty which Percy had humorously stated.

"Is the—is the foreign lady, who stays here, at home just now?" was his adroit way of naming the Oriental Mystery. "Can this gentleman see her? He will not detain her long."

Frank had expected that people who came upon such quests would find themselves at least objects of interest to those who must guess their business. He was quite struck by the easy, utter indifference of the dirty little serving-maid.

"Yes, Madame's in, sir," she answered, wiping her hands on her apron, "but I don't think she wants to see anybody to-day."

"Will you ask her, if you please," said Philip, with all his customary suavity of manner. "Say she has seen one of the gentle-

men before, and knows about the other. She won't want us to give our names, I am sure."

The girl seemed to listen only for the appearance of civility. Probably she knew well enough that "Madame's" refusals to be seen were guided entirely by some inner motives of Madame's own.

"I don't believe she will remember to repeat my messages," said Philip, as she went off, in seeming obedience. Certainly she scarcely remained away long enough to deliver them. She was at the door again in an instant. "Madame" was inexorable, nor did she send any excuse to soften the edge of her determination. The blunt statement was, "She can't see you to-day."

So the two young men could do nothing but retire. "Does she smell a rat?" wondered Philip. "Does she think we come as spies and foes, rather than as inquiring friends? Has my being with you anything to do with her denial of herself, think you, Frank?"

"Goodness knows."

"It's all nonsense, of course. I only wish Louisa was not so excited over it. And this unsatisfactory ending to the affair will just make her worse."

"I'll come here again to-morrow by myself," said Frank, his curiosity awakened now more than it had yet been. "We must get to the bottom of all this."

They did not return straightway to the Connells' house. Philip took his cousin with him for a saunter about the town, and he knew so many people, and all were so glad of a chat with the lively young barrister, one and another offering luncheon, that it was afternoon before they got home.

They found another visitor there. Marco Learli. He was sitting in the drawing-room with Mrs. Connell, Louisa, and Evelyn Agate. Miss Cleare was still with her pupils, and Mrs. Raven had retired to her own room, presumably to finish that letter to Leonard, which last night's catastrophe had interrupted.

Louisa's head was bowed over her needlework. Had anybody observed her narrowly, it would have been seen that a very natural dew-drop gemmed the flower she was embroidering. Mrs. Connell was talking to her guest with an air of more than usual solicitude and kindness. Evelyn half-reclined on the sofa: there was a strange look on her face, which instantly struck Philip Connell, who knew her countenance so well. Marco's chair, placed forward in the centre of the group, was slightly turned towards her.

"I am sure Philip will be as sorry as we all are," said Mrs. Connell, turning towards her son, as he advanced with Frank into the room. "Philip, prepare for a disagreeable surprise: Signor Learli finds it necessary to leave Colburn this evening."

"Not quite a surprise," murmured the young foreigner. "Miss Connell knows that even when I first arrived, I said my stay here was not likely to be so long as I had thought."

"Dear! but this is a sudden move!" exclaimed Philip, dropping into a chair. "Is it that the smoky atmosphere does not suit your southern constitution or your artistic inspiration? Oh, but you don't really mean it? Not to-night, at any rate! You are only harrowing our feelings."

"It is my own feelings that are harrowed," said the young painter, in his musical tones, with a sudden flashing glance of his dark eyes towards Evelyn. "Nay, I can never be better nor happier than I might be at Colburn. If I waited till my own will took me hence, I might remain here for ever."

"I hope you have had no bad news," resumed Philip, seriously.

The Italian's face changed. Its soft, graceful lines seemed to grow strong and hard; and a strange darkness, so palpable that it seemed almost of the body as well as the spirit, settled on his brow.

"The command of necessity and the call of duty cannot be bad news," he said, sternly. With the last word he looked up, and met Mrs. Connell's kind eyes, fixed on him in motherly tenderness. The ice that had closed about him seemed to melt instantly. His lip even quivered.

"And Signor Learli will not say when we are to see him again," said she to the others. "I want him to give me a promise for Christmas."

The young Italian shook his head. "The stray leaf goes before the wind," he answered. "The wind, and not the leaf, decides where it shall drop."

"But you think you shall be in this country then?" asked Mrs. Connell.

Marco did not answer readily. He reflected for a moment, and then said, simply:

"Yes."

Louisa looked up as he paused. She had commanded her face at last, and for a moment her eyes were free from tears. She longed to say to Marco, what would have seemed only natural civility to say, but for her consciousness of loving him so well—that surely he would not leave England without letting them know it, and, perhaps, seeing them before he went.

But the eyes that she fondly thought might have met her own were turned from her, and her glance only encountered Evelyn's. There was something in that glance which saved Louisa's poor woollen flowers from any more dewdrops! But her eyes burned and throbbed as in sharp contact with a cruel wind.

Then came another moment's silence. Marco broke it, by saying to Evelyn, in a low voice: "Let me hear you speak to me once more in the tongue of my own country."

She started up, and then sat down erect.

"You hear him," she said, looking round, as in apology. "Pardon him—and me—but it is so natural!"

And straightway she went on in Italian, her manner sweet, her eyes fixed on him. "What shall I say? I have no beautiful thoughts to utter! What can I wish you, when I do not know what you wish for yourself? Only believe that I always wish you well."

Marco answered in the same language, his impassioned tone hardly suppressed. "When I hear your voice, it is enough. Will you think of me while I am away? Will it matter to *you* whether or not I ever return?"

"Will it not?" she said, softly.

"Confound it!" thought Philip. "I wish I had made myself a more fluent Latin scholar, and then I should surely be able to make out a word here and there! It is my private impression that they are saying something uncommonly sweet."

Louisa rose, gently laid her work aside, and retired. Marco did not even seem to notice her going.

"All your friends here hope to see you again," said Evelyn.

"Do *you*?" he asked, passionately.

"I do," she said, dropping her eyelids. Mrs. Connell thought the girl was showing more womanly feeling than she had believed she possessed, for she seemed to be trembling. This sudden and desperate avowal of the passion she had consciously awakened, had actually startled even Evelyn Agate.

In the moment Marco first set eyes on her, he had awakened to the fact, that his fancy for Louisa Connell had been nothing but a pleasant friendship.

"If I live, you shall see me again," he murmured in answer. "Not here. Somewhere else—where we can speak together face to face, unheard, unwatched. I know where to find you. Every fact I have heard about you, is garnered in my heart. For a while, think of me. If I never come, forget me. Say to yourself, 'one more unhappy one is gone to his rest.'"

"I shall wait for you," said Evelyn, calmly. "Believe that."

They were standing up now, side by side, for he had risen to leave. He held out his hand and took hers. No other pledge was possible between the two then and there; and perhaps no tenderer caress would have been in harmony with Marco's high-strung mood. You would not have guessed them to be a pair of parting lovers; they did not look like it. Mrs. Connell thought only that the lad's poetic imagination and hungry heart had transformed the simple girl who spoke his mother-tongue, into an inspiring genius—a personification of his own restless patriotism.

They followed him through the hall to the very door. He did not ask after Percy (who was out), or Alice Cleare, or the little girls; no, nor after Mr. Connell.

Did he remember that he had not said good-bye to Louisa? She, standing in her own room, with clasped hands and straining eyes, wondered if she could run down and snatch a hasty farewell, whether

she was heeded or not. If she let him go without one, how would she feel after he was gone? But, oh! he was sure to ask for her at the very last; and if she had courage and faith to wait for that, it would leave her so much happier than if she sought it. She could hear the voices talking.

"Are you going straight from Colburn?" Philip asked. "Shall you leave by the last train? Would it not be nice if some of us ran down to the station at the last, and saw you off?"

There was a moment's hesitation before Marco replied. "My movements are a little uncertain," he said then. "I may have to go a short way out of the town to transact a slight matter of business on my way. If so, I shall drive on thence and catch the train at the next station. I would rather part with you here—at the door of your own home. Good-bye! good-bye!"

He was gone—without one word or thought for Louisa! She threw herself on her bed, and it was the same to the poor girl as if all the world had come to an end.

The others went back to the drawing-room. If there was fire in Evelyn's eyes, there was moisture in Mrs. Connell's.

"Poor boy!" she said. "There is certainly some mystery about him. I always fancy he feels something looming before his path. What can it be? I suppose creatures as slight as he, in the eyes of their contemporaries, have had their hand in the world's history before now."

As she spoke, she went to the window and hasped it, and drew the curtains. They would not be in that room again till all was dark, and after the preceding night, she felt a little nervous.

It was the tapping of Evelyn at Louisa's door which aroused the girl from her ecstasy of pain—Evelyn's rap and her clear, bell-like tone, announcing that it would soon be dinner time. And poor Louisa, with true womanly instinct, struggled to suppress all signs of misery, and went forth apparently calm. The breaking-down might come later, but it should not be in the sight of Evelyn.

In honour of the presence of Mrs. Raven, accustomed to state and show, the Connell dinners were made much more formal affairs than when the family were alone. In this respect, at least, Mrs. Connell had refused Philip's advice to persist in the ordinary household programme, and make no difference of any kind. Dessert was on the table, when the servant came in and whispered something to Louisa, which caused her face to flush vividly, as she instructed the girl to "tell mamma."

"Marco Learli back again!" exclaimed Mrs. Connell. "He says we are not to be interrupted if we are at dinner; he will wait. For whom did he ask, Julia?"

"For me, surely!" cried Percy, springing to his feet.

"No, sir," said the girl; "he asked for Miss Connell."

"You had better go to him at once, Louisa," said her mother

"and if he can really wait, stay with him until we have finished."

"You see I was right," whispered Evelyn to Philip.

"Right?" he replied, not understanding her.

"That some adieux cannot be made in public."

"Hang it!" thought Philip, glancing at his adversary. "She's playing with us all somehow—as false as a hare!"

How light a heart can grow in a moment! Louisa wondered how she could ever have doubted Marco. She saw now what it was—that he had never forgotten her—it was but the coyness of love which had withheld him from asking for her—just as the desperate pain of silent parting had now driven him back. He had come, and that was enough.

But as she entered the drawing-room she started. Where was he? Had he vanished? Before she had time for a thought, he stepped forward from the window, letting the curtains close again behind him. Oh, what a face of agony he had! And how strange it was that even that did not make her feel less happy.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said, "and to bring back that."

He held out a little volume of poems with Louisa's name in it, which they had read together during their first meetings by the sea, and which he had retained in memory of those happy days.

"It was a gift," gasped Louisa. After all, there was something in his face which frightened her. This was no lover's sorrow. It was terror; it was despair.

"Take it again," he said, in that strange, low voice; "take it, and forget me. I shall never forget you,"—Louisa's heart leaped—"nor your mother, nor your home. It was a vision I had, and it is gone. Well for you that it is so! Good-bye, Miss Connell! good-bye for ever!"

"Oh, Marco, do not go like this!" sobbed the girl, in heart-rending bewilderment, as he turned to the door. She felt herself powerless as a silken thread to hold him, and in her misery she uttered what she knew were futile pleas the moment they passed her lips: "Stay and see papa—and Percy."

"Let me go," he cried, drawing away his hand. "It was all a mistake, and we must part."

And here again Louisa's weakness came to her rescue. A larger nature would have been maddened by its pain into utter unconsciousness of everything except its present anguish. But Louisa remembered Evelyn, and the slow tortures of days to come. Without a word she walked out of the drawing-room before Marco. Without a word she stepped before him down the hall. But at the dining-room door she paused, and threw it open.

"Papa, Percy, Signor Learli came back to say good-bye to you; and as he is really in haste, I know you don't mind being interrupted."

Despite his unwillingness, he had to enter; and that was how it ended—in another round of hand-shakings and inquiries and regrets. Evelyn did not leave her seat at the dining-table, and Louisa came back and resumed hers before the door had closed behind Marco.

Everybody retired early, because everybody was tired. No disturbance occurred that night. But in that small, quiet, comfortable household there were two—one of the young people and one of the seniors—who never closed their eyes.

One lay with her face buried in her pillow. The other drew her curtains aside, and sat down beside her unscreened window—and watched.

What did Mrs. Raven watch for! What did she see? Why did she find herself an hour afterwards returning to consciousness seated in her chair by the window, her candle burned down, and the moon, which had been shining so brightly, lost behind thick clouds? If she had told Philip what she had seen, he might have answered her that dreams are strange combinations of the facts and fancies of past hours.

But when we are not sure of ourselves whether we are waking or sleeping; when we feel that if our fancies are fancies they are worse than facts, because they leave no solid ground whereon to set our own soul, then we begin to keep our own counsel.

But nobody was disturbed that night by any sound in Mr. Connell's house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ADMITTED

THE next morning rose dull and grey, with a fine drizzle of rain, one of those genuinely English days which come at the most unexpected seasons, and serve, at least, as material for conversation.

Mrs. Raven did not appear at breakfast. Word came down that she was not well. And when Mrs. Connell went to see her she was struck with her nervous and wrung appearance. She thought that these manifest traces of suffering must be latent: this passing indisposition surely could not produce them! The kind woman's heart warmed to her. She was her brother's widow, after all.

Mrs. Connell was startled to find that Mrs. Raven seemed to have set her heart on going home, saying that she found she was in no condition to be anybody's guest, and that she feared that change, from which she had hoped so much, was only making her worse.

"My dear—sister," Mrs. Connell actually said, in her compassion, "You have not given it a fair trial yet. I believe that fright the other night has upset you. You must not imagine such a thing is likely to occur again. I can assure you such incidents are as rare here as they

can be at Raven. I know how you country folk credit towns with everything that is uncomfortable and wicked. But we have lived here nearly thirty years, and nothing of this sort has happened before."

"Perhaps it happened in my honour," said Mrs. Raven, with a sickly smile. "You ought to be glad to get quit of me."

Mrs. Connell protested, and then went off to her kitchen to give sundry directions about dainties for the invalid's lunch. She gathered an impression that that domestic section of her house was not in perfect peace. Minton was in a state of dignified displeasure with Julia, the younger servant. But the mistress did not choose to make any inquiries. Mrs. Connell rarely interfered with her delegates in kitchen or school-room. If they were found not fit to be trusted, then it was time for them to be deposed.

Certainly there was no gainsaying the good sense of the remark which Mrs. Connell overheard falling from Minton's lips.

"Don't tell me any falsehoods, Julia," said that worthy woman. "That's sure to be the upshot of flurries and hurries and frights, and things that can't be accounted for. They serve well enough as excuses for ways that need excuses. It isn't the first time that you've not known what you were doing. There! say no more. If you had done it, as was your duty, and as you say it was done, then I should have found it done this morning, and there's an end on't."

When Mrs. Connell returned to the sick-room, she met her nephew coming out of it. Frank had been paying his mother a visit. To him, too, she spoke of a speedy return home. She would go as soon as possible. She could not rise to-day, but she would be able to travel to-morrow.

"I don't think you should have left your room either, Miss Connell," said Evelyn, addressing Louisa later. "I am quite sure you are suffering like your aunt; and, like her, you would have been better at rest and in quietness."

"I always suffer when I lose any sleep," answered Louisa, bravely; "but I never allow myself to give way to mere sensations of languor and weariness."

Frank looked at his cousin when he heard this little colloquy. How pale and changed she was! Was this the same girl whose blooming beauty had so struck him when he first arrived at Colburn so short a time back? And the havoc in her appearance seemed to have been wrought in the last few hours.

Frank wondered. Had Louisa's nerves really been so shaken by the interview with the woman—in conjunction possibly with the fright that occurred the following night? He recalled his promise to go to her to-day.

Only he shrank from it. It was odd how reluctant he felt to do what he knew to be contrary to the views held by Alice Cleare. Why should the wisdom of this young governess, younger even than

himself, have so much weight with him? To be sure it came commended by her sweet face and patient, cheerful life; which, since he knew what he knew of her losses and sorrows and heroisms, seemed to him as a life bearing witness of the goodness of God.

"Miss Cleare," he said to her, lingering in the morning-room after breakfast, while she was busily correcting one of her pupil's exercises, "does it puzzle you very much if people don't always act as if they saw things in what you see to be the right light?"

Alice laughed aloud. "Do you mean to insinuate that I always think I am right?" she asked merrily.

"No, no, certainly not," he answered, flushing, as he saw how easily his speech could bear this playful interpretation, and felt how hard it was to express his real meaning. "No, no; but would you imagine that anybody must surely set very light value on your opinions if they did not entirely follow them out?"

Alice was quite grave now. She looked up at him with her pure, sweet eyes, as she answered, "I should be quite satisfied with whatever anybody did, if I felt sure they were only seeking to do what was right and kind. Opinions may differ about details, but I think those who honestly seek to follow good and escape evil are sure to meet at the goal. Opinions change, too. Some matters which I once deemed harmless, I now think wrong, and in what I once thought I saw harm, I now see none."

"It is not always easy to know what is right," Frank observed.

Alice went on diligently with her work. "To do that which really seems to us right is the surest way to learn what is best, I believe," she said timidly; "though in the course of the lesson we may have to undo our own work."

"Thank you, Miss Cleare," said Frank. "So, if I do my best, you will be really satisfied with me—though my best may be poor enough! There have not been too many people satisfied with me yet!" he added, a little sadly.

From this conversation, he went, without speaking to Philip, straight off to Daylight Villa. He did not like his errand, but he had, in a manner, promised to go, to help Louisa—not but that it was a bit of a puzzle to him, a thing he had never understood quite clearly, how anything the witch might communicate to himself would relieve Louisa's state of nervous terror.

Would the strange woman refuse to see him again? If so, he could not help it. He would not allow himself to think whether he would be glad or sorry; or even whether, or no, he expected another denial.

But this time the untidy serving-girl opened wide the door.

"Madame is at home," she said, "and quite disengaged."

(To be continued.)

MY SATURDAYS.

CYPRUS LAWN.

I.

THE first question is—how came I to have Saturdays? No; perhaps there is a prior question—who am I that have them? Let me introduce myself as briefly as possible. Vera Singleton, widow, no children, age of no importance, circumstances comfortable, resident at Tamston. That is quite as much, I think, as I need say about myself, before I go back to the very primal origin of my Saturdays. One chilly May afternoon, when Charlotte Stamwood (our Rector's second daughter) and Lucilla Minton (daughter of the Honourable Mrs. Minton) were drinking my tea, and plotting against my peace. Charlotte had sat down on the rug in front of a little bit of fire—for the afternoon was rather rainy and chilly, and I don't block up my grates by the almanack—and began artfully:

"It is so nice and cheerful to see a fire again, when everybody is trying so hard to believe that it is spring, and failing so miserably in the attempt. That is one of your strong points, Mrs. Singleton; you always see what is wanted, and go straight and do it, whether it happens to be *de rigueur* or not."

"Mrs. Singleton loves to make everyone happy, in great things and small," chimed in Lucilla.

"Girls," I said, "this is too much. Something is coming upon me; I know the symptoms."

"And do you meanly shrink?" answered Charlotte, magnificently. "Do not all gifts bring responsibilities? If you have an original mind, ought you not to do original things? If you have a benevolent heart, will you not seek the happiness of your fellow-creatures? If you have a charming house, will you not open its doors? And if you have a delightful garden, going down to the river, and a lawn big enough for tennis—will you not—oh, dear, Mrs. Singleton, *do*—give garden-parties in summer?"

Charlotte twisted herself round at the end of her pathetic appeal, and knelt at my feet, with a comical expression of entreaty; and Lucilla dropped down beside her, and joined in her supplications.

"Seriously, you might do a great deal of good," continued Charlotte. "Society in Tamston is so horribly clique-ish, and numbers of people don't know each other who would really get on well, if they only put aside their nonsense for once, and found out their links instead of looking at their fences. You could ask people together in that informal way whom you could not invite to meet each other at dinner, and as you have always kept out of those tangles, you are in a position to do it."

The little minx had touched one of my weak points. I knew quite well that she was only repeating what she had heard me say a dozen times; but her words conjured up a vision of class-differences smoothed away, and social bonds drawn closer on my lawn, and I myself dispensing tea and gentle influences, a sort of Spirit of Harmony. The more I looked at that pretty picture the better I liked it; and the result was that I sent round cards to all my acquaintances in Tamston, announcing that I should be at home on the first Saturday afternoon in June, and on all subsequent Saturdays until further notice. I felt decidedly nervous about the first, and chartered my nephew, Archibald Rintoul, to come down for it, and help me through—under a distinct engagement to play one game of tennis with Lucilla Minton, get her tea, and then no more. Archibald had serious love-affairs of his own, but they were just then in a tangled condition; and he is a man who, without the least treachery to the eyes that are far, gets all the fun possible out of the eyes that are near. At the beginning of the summer and my enterprise, a flirtation would be far too serious a matter; neither could I have Lucilla's spirits damped by neglect. Archibald promised all possible discretion, and engaged two of his friends to row up with him from Richmond, and add to the London element of my party. He himself was a writer and magazine editor, a clever and agreeable man, whose presence would carry me a long way towards success. And so, having made my cakes, and ordered my ices, I awaited with some composure my first appearance as a leader of society.

II.

THAT first Saturday was all that a day in a late June should be. The air was sweet with may-blossom, the heavy spikes of lilac swung slowly back and forwards, and poured their fragrance into it; a golden rain of laburnum glorified my garden walks; the crimson hawthorn blossomed boldly, taking precedence of the roses, which as yet only put out a flower here and there to compete with it. Down among the uncut grass in their own private nook, the violets were waiting to be sought for; and the magnificent horse-chestnut waved faintly his great fans of green, and delicate cones of pink and white, over the wall which divided my domain from Cyprus Lawn.

I depended upon my next-door neighbours as an element in the success of my Saturdays, though it was always impossible to be sure of them. Professor Lingard was a man of about forty, thin and fallow. His fine blue eyes had dark hollows under them, and plaintive lines ran down from the eyebrows, and deepened the troubled expression of the high, pale forehead. No face with those eyes and that brow could be quite uninteresting; but when the Professor was depressed, or nervous, or really unwell (and all three were frequent occurrences), he collapsed, and looked like a sick lizard. A really learned and able man, he had made small mark upon the world, chiefly for

want of "grit." His friends wondered that he had not done more; and he knew that they wondered, and felt himself a disappointment and a failure, and so failed the more, from want of spirit to succeed. He had a small income, and a Professorship of History in one of the London colleges; and as he and his wife had no children, they got on fairly as to money matters, though with a good deal of management on Rhoda's part.

Rhoda had life and colour enough for two. Some fifteen years younger than her husband, worry had not worn away her bright Irish prettiness. Her soft, grey eyes were still ready to dance and sparkle, though they had shed a good many tears; and she threw herself impulsively into everything that was going on, taking up every new plan or topic as eagerly as if disappointment and failure had not been household words for her. Yet she was not quite the perfect wife for such a man. He gave her a melancholy fondness, as to a bright young creature whose life he had hopelessly overshadowed; and she was devoted to him, but had not succeeded in being much positive help to him. At first she had believed in him altogether; but when she saw him let opportunity after opportunity slip through his fingers, for want of a push at the right time, she lost her faith, and had a hard struggle not to despise him. She could not trust her own impetuous temper, and resolved once for all to accept the inevitable. He could not succeed; there was something wanting among all his gifts which doomed him to failure; she would be patient, bear her share of the trouble, and make his as light to him as possible. And so the Professor—who was sensitive to all influences—knew that his wife, too, held him a failure; and he endured her cheerful exhortations as a man dying of consumption might a mustard-plaster,—a well-meant irritation, quite useless for purposes of cure, but not likely to last long.

The chief standing trouble of their lives was the Island of Cyprus. Perhaps I should rather say—the failure of a great book which the Professor had written upon it; but really the island itself seemed to exercise a malign influence upon them. He had studied it and its antiquities very profoundly before his marriage, ridden and walked about it a great deal, and become well acquainted with a place in which hardly anyone then took the slightest interest. He had collected the greater part of his materials before he met Rhoda, and fell in love with her in the absorbed, sudden fashion of a student who had never fairly looked a woman in the face before, and believed that the one intelligent member of her sex was entirely exceptional.

Of course they went to Cyprus for their honeymoon, and had their only really happy time, roughing it in all sorts of ways, and making progress with the great work, which Rhoda wrote at her husband's dictation. It was interrupted by his falling ill of malaria fever and ague, and poor Rhoda had a terrible six weeks nursing him, far away from English doctors and trustworthy medicines. He recovered at

last; but his health, which was never strong, had been seriously shaken, and the ague always hovered near.

Then, when the book was finished, it could not be published. It was a mass of learning—topographical, geological, meteorological detail, antiquarian discoveries and theories, historical discussions, the whole lightened by accounts of personal adventures in search of the facts given; but the result was an ill-arranged accumulation of information that few people wanted, and no publisher would undertake. Rhoda wished to sell out some of their little capital, and publish the book at their own expense; but he was too timid to burn their boats in such a fashion, and indeed it would have been a great risk, though necessity might have inspired him with energy. He did send one rather heavy article to the editor of a popular magazine, and when it was declined, could never be induced to try another. So now they had given up hope, the MS. was locked away, and they avoided talking of the place, whose very name seemed impossible to escape. They had fastened it upon themselves, by dubbing their little house—when they first came to it, happy at the Professor's recovery, and with the book almost finished—Cyprus Lawn, playing on the word, in half allusion to *Il Penseroso*; and they had celebrated their arrival by planting a wretched little cypress, which at first looked as miserable as a shrub well could, but seemed to flourish, vampire-like, on their sickening hopes.

In spite of all these troubles, the Lingards were a great acquisition to the neighbourhood. The Professor was brighter in society than often at home; he could talk eloquently and sometimes amusingly, and his range of subjects was very wide. He could not chatter nothings, or discuss the weather or local politics with interest; but he intensely enjoyed real conversation, and was no monopolist, loving to share his thoughts, and breathe the subtle changes of air which blow from other people's minds. If he were dull, Rhoda hung about wistfully, trying to lead him into talk, and make up his deficiencies; but when she saw him interested and happy, she would go off, and be the life of the party, chattering, laughing, playing games, doing everything lively but flirting.

So when my guests began to assemble, I anxiously scanned the Lingards, as they came round the corner of the house to where I was receiving on the lawn, and was relieved to see the Professor swinging his tennis-racquet. I knew in a moment that he was in a cheerful and sociable state of mind. Rhoda, in a soft, trailing white cashmere, with bunches of late primroses in her dress, and white muslin-trimmed hat, looked an incarnation of the spring.

All Tamston honoured me with its company. The Honourable Mrs. Minton rustled her brown and old-gold silk up and down and round on the gravel, until a subdued hiss seemed to pervade the place; Lucilla chirped about on her own account; Mrs. Stamwood and the girls appeared early, and the Rector looked in upon us in the

afternoon, with an indulgent father-of-his-people air; Captain Perth and his daughters came from Fir Grove to see how I should get on—I fear with a mild expectation that I should fail, and that they would be able to bear it. The Doctor was there, and of course had to go away in the middle; the Curate came early and stayed late, with a vigorous determination to enjoy himself; various young men, come down for Sunday, accompanied their families or hosts; and there were two groups of county people, not often captured at Tamston entertainments.

Tennis was started at once, Archibald diligently doing his duty by Lucilla; tea and talk were soon in full swing among little knots under the trees; and I looked round at the populated garden with pardonable complacency. Rhoda Lingard and young Mr. Minton played the first game against Archibald and Lucilla; and when it was finished, I arranged the next to include the Professor, who was a capital player. Meantime the quartette were taking tea together, and I took the opportunity of introducing one of Archie's friends to Lucilla, to break up the pairs.

I had introduced Archibald to Rhoda when the game began, and now they drifted into interested talk over their cups of tea. Lucilla and her new cavalier went off; but the others sat on, and after a time moved away, only to walk round and round the garden in eager conversation. The Professor was absorbed in his game; the sides were so evenly matched that it was a long one, and when it was over, they kept possession of the ground, and turned it into a match. This was not fair to other people, but I would not interfere while Rhoda was engrossed. It was not often that she had a chance of a real talk with a clever man, and I knew how she would throw herself into it, and forget everything outside. So the Professor stood in readiness like a waiting cat, and sprang from side to side with feline rushes—his hair flapping, his face, for once, crimson, and his blue eyes aflame with the ardour of battle; while his wife and my nephew paced and talked. The talk ended before the match did, and Rhoda came up to me, bright-eyed and radiant.

"Vera, I am so happy. Mr. Rintoul has given me such hope. We can't talk now; I will come in to-morrow afternoon, and tell you all about it. There! Edwin has finished his game: you won't mind our going early, will you? I want to talk to him so much. I am sure your party is a great success; I have enjoyed myself beyond everything." And as soon as she could draw away her husband from discussing his game and drinking cider-cup, they went off—Rhoda holding his arm, and evidently beginning to pour out her eagerness to him before they were round the corner of the house.

The afternoon crept on as other afternoons do, and gradually people went off to their respective dinners; a few lingerers at tennis played on desperately, until my maids began to collect cups and saucers, and then, struck with remorse, they set to work to carry chairs

and sofas indoors. So, by-and-bye, my dwelling was restored to its usual order, Lucilla had waved her farewell to the Londoners as they rowed down the river, and at last taken her mother off my hands; and I sat down, tired but triumphant, to administer a substantial tea to Archibald, and hear what his wide experience thought of my *début*.

"It was very fair, auntie; very fair, indeed. Games well kept up, plenty of talk, people well mixed. Eatables and everything of that sort, first-rate. The question is: Shall you be able to keep it up? It will do very well if you are a woman of original mind, and can have a little variety every time, and keep something going; otherwise, there is danger of *toujours perdrix*."

"I must try," I said. "At any rate, I have made a good start, and I look to you for some of the variety. Mind, you have *carte blanche* to bring or send anyone you think an addition."

"You don't suppose I have an unlimited stock of nice young men for small tea-parties, do you? After all, the great question is, how much do you local people care to see of each other?"

"I fancy that we have social materials here," I returned, "though rather in a state of disintegration; but time will show. By-the-bye, you seemed to find a sympathetic listener in my friend Rhoda."

"I should think so. She is clever enough to understand what is said to her, and has something to say on her own account; and then, every now and again, she comes out with something so deliciously silly that you feel she would be nowhere if you did not look after her."

"And, pray, in what manner do you propose to look after Mrs. Lingard?"

"Come, auntie, give me credit for not meaning an impertinence. Mrs. Lingard is one of those sweet, soft, impulsive women who are capable of great follies and sublime heroism, and both together; their fairness makes life harmonious, and their caprices make it interesting: they do none of the work of the world, or do it ill, but they alone make it worth doing. In her individual capacity she appears to me to be a pretty woman, with a rather helpless husband on her hands; but if he really has half the brains she says (which probably he hasn't), I may be able to do something for him."

"He has plenty of brains, as you would find out in half an hour's talk with him, providing he had not *ague* coming on, or *dyspepsia* going off, or a headache in full course, and that the wind was not in the east. But how do you see a chance for him?"

"Only because he seems to know a good deal about a subject which is coming to the front. Nobody cared a halfpenny about Cyprus until we put down our thumb on it; but now everything about it is of interest to some one. A man who really has stores of information ready to hand, worked up into some kind of shape, is sure of a market, if he only knows how to go about his selling. But

these amateurs think that if they cannot sell hot potatoes at Midsummer, it is a sign that nobody wants them at Christmas. Lingard might have been in print weeks ago, if his stuff is worth anything."

"Are you going to talk to him?"

"Of course I can't interfere further than I am asked to do. I have explained all this to Mrs. Lingard, and told her that if her husband cares to talk the matter over with me, I shall be very happy to put my experience at his command."

Archibald smoked and dozed in the punt all Sunday afternoon, evidently expecting the Lingards; but they did not appear. When the bells were ringing for evening service, however, Rhoda came in on her way to church, dressed with Sunday precision in black silk, with a neat little neutral-coloured bonnet. Romance, brightness and beauty were gone out of her fashionable dress and composed pale face; her eyes were a little pink, and she spoke as if she had considered what she was going to say.

"I only came in as I was going to church, to tell you, Mr. Rintoul, that I am afraid I was too impulsive in presuming on your kindness yesterday. I often speak hastily, without thinking enough first. My husband does not consider that there would be any use in doing anything about his book, and it would not be fair to give you so much trouble for nothing. I ought to have remembered how valuable your time was."

"I assure you," answered Archibald earnestly, "that it would not be giving me any trouble at all. It would be a pleasure to me."

"You are very good," Rhoda answered, "but Professor Lingard has quite made up his mind to let the matter alone. I feel your kindness very much, and I did hope that something might have been done, but I see it is impossible."

She spoke almost tearfully. Archibald grew more eager as the obstacles towered higher.

"But why, Mrs. Lingard? Can nothing be done to persuade him? There is a real opening for the book now."

"Oh yes, I told him all that you said; but it is of no use. He has been so often disappointed that he cannot bear to be disappointed any more. And I cannot urge him again—it worries him too much. I lose courage myself when I remember what we went through before, when the book was going round from publisher to publisher, and think of having that all over again. We have failed, and we must accept failure. We only hurt ourselves by fresh efforts."

She had drawn back her tears, and spoke with steady calm. Archibald became unusually excited.

"Accept failure!" he exclaimed. "That is talking sheer nonsense. Thackeray failed, Disraeli failed, Defoe failed, Milton failed. Did any of them accept failure? Should we have half-a-dozen great

writers now, if our leaders had accepted failure? A man who accepts failure is one who deserves to fail."

I was afraid Rhoda would be dreadfully hurt, but she was not applying the hard words to her husband at all. Her eyes brightened, and her cheeks flushed; she was simply inspirited by the stimulus, as by a rough splash of cold water.

"You are quite right, Mr. Rintoul," she exclaimed; "it is base to despair. If there were anything I could do, I would do it, except worry my husband any more. But you see there is not even any definite proposal to put before him."

"And I cannot make one in the dark. If I could get a sight of the manuscript: could you manage that?"

Rhoda shook her head.

"There is not a rough copy of any part of it? Even one chapter would be a specimen from which I could form some idea of the rest."

"Yes," cried Rhoda, "I kept all the rough notes, but you could never read them: some of them are in Edwin's worst scrawl, and some in mine, and corrected and altered over and over again by both of us. I could copy them for you, though. Oh, would not that do?"

She clasped her hands excitedly. Archibald was scarcely less excited.

"Of course it would do; the problem is solved. But don't begin at the beginning, and toil on to the end. Make out a list of the subjects of the different chapters, and I will tell you which to copy. If you send it to my aunt as soon as it is ready, she will forward it to me, and so no time will be lost. Or you had better send it direct; here is my card. I shall be down again next Saturday, and by that time we shall begin to see where we are."

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times. I felt as if a door had opened before me yesterday, and then it shut so closely again; it was worse than if it had never opened. You men don't know how dreadful it is to sit still and watch other people *not* doing things, and not be able to lift a finger."

Rhoda had spoken more of her heart in those last words than she had at all intended, and took leave hurriedly, rather frightened at herself. Archibald remarked, meditatively:

"That's a sweet little woman, but I am an everlasting fool. If the book turns out rubbish, *what* a mess I have got into!"

III.

I SAW and heard nothing more of the Lingards until Wednesday, when Rhoda came in at afternoon tea-time, looking tired, but bright.

"Sit down, dear," I said, "and drink a cup of tea before you begin to tell me how you come to have such pale cheeks."

"The tea by all means, ever-hospitable Vera ; but I can talk while you are pouring it out. Edwin has had one of his upsets ; I suppose that is why I look rather the worse for wear."

"I am sorry to hear it : nothing very bad, I hope ?"

"I am afraid it was bringing up that wretched Cyprus business again ; it reminds him of so many standing troubles, and when he once begins to worry, he cannot leave off. And worry always knocks him up. We have had a very pénible three days."

"Poor child," I said, pityingly. (I always found it difficult to pity the Professor.)

"Oh, Vera, it is hard !" she exclaimed, dropping her hands in her lap, and looking at me with pathetic eyes. "It is like Gulliver in Lilliput—tied down by his hair. There is an end to be gained, a victory to be won, and plenty of strength to do it—strength of brain in him, strength of will in me. And when we would throw ourselves at it, we are held back by miserable little bonds which no one else can see, but which make any movement such intolerable pain."

"I know, dear ; I think I understand."

"I am sure you do ; but you know I cannot explain it to Mr. Rintoul ; he must think what he likes. It is plainer than ever that my husband cannot stand any discussion of the subject, until there is positive, certain good news ; and it is plain, too, that it will not do to lose this chance. So I will do all that is needed myself, and keep it a secret from him. I hate anything under-hand, but I see no other way. You will help me through, won't you ?"

"Certainly I will. And now that you have made up your mind, we won't think about the difficulties except as they arise. What about the list ?"

She took a paper out of her pocket, and waved it triumphantly.

"There it is, and hard work I have had to get it. The notes were stowed away in the most un-get-at-able corner of the lumber-room ; and when I found them, they were in such utter confusion that it took me hours to put the chapters together. It was like making up a dissected map. Now, will you post it to Mr. Rintoul for me at once ?"

I duly forwarded the list to Archibald. On Friday I had a hurried note from him : "Tell Mrs. Lingard to copy the chapters on 'Antiquities,' 'Climate and Soil,' and 'Personal Adventures,' and to let me have them as done. Will be down to-morrow."

Armed with this, I went in to inquire after the Professor, and express my hopes of seeing him next day. He was in one of his moods of depression, and owned himself to be feeling oppressed by the warm weather. He put it differently :

"It is too much for me, Mrs. Singleton—this blaze of colour and breath of incense everywhere. I am out of tune, I fear. At any rate, I should certainly be so at your merry party."

I grew cross, and tired of persuading him ; so I said good-bye.

Rhoda accompanied me to the garden-gate, and I gave her Archibald's directions. Her face lighted up.

"Oh, it will be delightful to be fairly at work! Though how I shall do it without Edwin's finding out, I cannot imagine. He is always coming in when I don't expect him."

"Bring in your writing to my house whenever you can, then," I answered, "and perhaps I can help you with it. Good-bye, dear; I wish I were to have you to-morrow."

"Thanks; but it is better not, just now, and I cannot bear to waste time."

Back she went, with her quick, elastic step; and I devoted myself to superintending the fixing of an Aunt Sally, intended to divert Lucilla and a few of the bolder spirits from the tennis-ground.

There is not much to record about my second Saturday. Aunt Sally was fairly patronized; and I provided crackers for prizes, which gave rise to a mild excitement and some small jokes. A few of the elderly gentlemen condescended to try their chance; tea and tennis went on as usual, and there was a little variety in the guests. Altogether, it did very well. Archie, however, declared that it was flat. Lucilla bored him; he took to tennis to escape her, and had a bad partner; and he was evidently annoyed at Rhoda's absence. It had not occurred to him before that while he was interested in the work for the sake of her, she was interested in him for the sake of the work; and he did not like the idea. All these circumstances being perfectly obvious to me, I was not much ruffled by being reminded that he had told me I could not keep it up, and that to make a thing of the kind an institution, one required large grounds and unlimited resources. Nor did I deeply regret that he was unable to stay for Sunday.

On Monday, Rhoda came in to begin her work. We divided the heterogeneous pages of the chapter on "Antiquities" between us, I taking the first part, and worked away steadily for an hour and a half—as long as Rhoda ventured to stay. When she went away, I kept my share, determining to give an hour a day to it, in hopes that the whole chapter might be ready for Archibald on Saturday. I made but slow progress, though; and greatly was I surprised when Rhoda appeared on Thursday, having finished her part, to fetch whatever remained to be done.

"My dear, how you must have worked! When did you do it?"

"Early and late," laughed Rhoda; "I get up a quarter of an hour earlier, and somehow breakfast is not quite so punctual as it used to be, and a page or two get written. I have quite time to finish the rest of this by Saturday afternoon; I will not have you bore yourself any more this week."

Truth to tell, I was not sorry to get off; for if there is one subject

of which I am more ignorant than another, it is archæology; and as to whether a particular temple—of which about six stones are remaining—was dedicated to Aphrodite or Eros, I cannot induce myself to care in the least. I could see that the writing was extremely good, but the chapter on "Antiquities" seemed to me too long to form an item in any book not dedicated to Methuselah.

I had prepared a grand *coup* for Saturday. A little way above my lawn was an islet in the river, belonging to old Mr. Merton, always a great ally of mine. Nothing grew upon it but willows, and it was only used as a centre for punt-fishing. I fixed my strategic eye upon it as a point of vantage, and the kind owner gave me leave to do whatever I liked with it all the summer. There was an open, grassy bank at one side; there I had a wooden step fixed to make the landing easy, and a few rugs thrown about on which to sit. On the top of the island I had the willows cleared away, and a small tent pitched, with seats round it.

Here I established one of my maids with strawberries and cream, which were then just coming in. As they were not to be had upon the mainland, an excellent reason was at once established for any amount of punting and boating, and constant movement was kept up, while I held in my hands a tremendous power of pairing and separating my guests at pleasure. The plan was crowned with success, and it realised my fondest expectations when Archibald pronounced it a really original idea.

An old family friend of mine, Dr. Lucraft, happened to be passing through London at the time, and I secured him for my party, not because I expected to profit by his society, but in order that he should talk to the Professor. The latter appeared with his wife, in fair average spirits; but I could see that the needle of his barometer stood delicately poised at Change.

The two men had much in common, and I talked to them together, until they were fairly started on old Continental churches. Then I looked after Rhoda. She was diligently talking to Mrs. Minton, but I could see the flush of suppressed excitement on her cheeks, matching the June rose which she wore in the same white dress; and I knew that the MS. was waiting its time in her pocket. Archibald was hanging about, throwing bread to the minnows. I requested Mr. Merton to do the honours of his island and my strawberries to Mrs. Minton, and then sent Archibald in one of the pleasure-boats with Rhoda.

I was not surprised to see that he rowed for some distance up the river, instead of landing; but I was a little provoked that—between the row and the strawberries—he detained Rhoda for fully three-quarters of an hour. The Professor and Dr. Lucraft sauntered up to me, and then the latter plunged into inquiries after my sisters and cousins and aunts. I had to give him my attention, and enjoyed the familiar gossip; but I was not quite easy about the Professor. I do

not know what became of him, but I suppose he felt neglected, and grew bored; at any rate, when I met him again later, after Rhoda had returned, he looked decidedly cross. She had joined him at once, but his skies were cloudy; he declared himself not up to tennis, and they soon took leave. I perceived breakers ahead, and wished the great book in the hands of the Caliph Omar.

However, here it was, and had to be copied. Next week, the chapter on "Climate and Soil" was our *pièce de résistance*. Rhoda came in from time to time, and worked diligently, and the quantity she accomplished was marvellous. The chapter was finished on Friday, and despatched to Archibald by post.

Saturday was a blank day. The weather broke the evening before, and the day was thoroughly and hopelessly wet. I felt grateful to it for not being uncertain, and sat quietly indoors, and copied a page or two of "Personal Adventures." My feelings fluctuated about the *Magnum Opus*; sometimes I looked upon it as an Old Man of the Sea, but on the whole I was growing much interested in it. When the subject was anything which I could understand, I admired the thoroughness and grasp of the author's mind; the style was admirable, and there were beautiful bits of description. The "Personal Adventures" were capitally told, and altogether my opinion of Professor Lingard was rising.

Rhoda ran in, waterproofed, while I was thus employed. "You good creature," she cried, kissing me, "you do toil at that copying as if it were for yourself. I told Edwin that I must come in and see in what state you were, for fear some dreadful bore should have inflicted his or herself upon you, and you needed help. In reality, of course I wanted a chance to write. I am afraid he thought me unkind to leave him, so I must not stay long, or waste time in talking."

"Is he well to-day?"

"Oh yes; at least, I don't know that he is ill. But he has been a good deal out of sorts lately; somehow, I fancy that he feels something in the air—he is so sensitive. Oh! I wish this job were done; I cannot bear not telling him what I am at—I feel as if I were being strangled with cobwebs."

I read a good deal between the lines of this speech; but she took to copying with feverish energy, and we had no more talk. At half-past four she rose to go, and would not be induced to stay for tea.

"No, Vera, I don't like leaving him alone any longer. If you felt courageous enough to make a rush through the rain, I could promise you a cup of mine, and you would be doing a good action."

I felt some curiosity to see the state of affairs at Cyprus Lawn; so I enveloped myself in waterproof and goloshes, and was soon in Rhoda's pretty little drawing-room. The Professor was writing letters—a rare occupation for him; he rose and shook hands in somewhat cloudy fashion.

"After all, no bores attacked Vera but myself," Rhoda reported, "so here I am back again."

"I did not expect you so soon," he replied, coldly; "I knew you would find pleasant company at Mrs. Singleton's."

"I have induced Mrs. Singleton to bring her pleasant company in here, you see," she rejoined, with persistent cheerfulness; "and now I am going to make her as good a cup of tea as she gives us."

"I never drink tea," responded her husband, sourly.

"That is a pity," I said; "for your wife makes it better than anyone I know, and she never will tell me where she gets it."

"I must keep the monopoly of my one domestic success," laughed Rhoda.

"It is an unexpected pleasure to me to learn that our house can offer any attraction to Mrs. Singleton, comparable with those which hers possesses for—us," said the Professor, with pointed ill-temper.

"Oh, I don't much believe in its fascinations," I said hurriedly, discomposed by the growing embarrassment of the situation. "I fancy my strawberries and cream are the most attractive things."

"They are: *very* attractive," he answered, with intensified bitterness.

Could I have said a worse thing? I bit my lip savagely in pure anger at my own blundering, and sat in stupid silence. Rhoda's pretty eyebrows rose with a pained wrinkle, but the entrance of the servant with the tea-tray made a slight break. The Professor seemed somewhat ashamed of himself, and handed me my cup of tea and all belonging thereto with assiduous politeness. Rhoda's eyebrows went down, and as he returned to his chair near the table she touched his cheek with a caressing gesture. He caught her hand, kissed it passionately, and looked up into her eyes as if he would search her through and through. She flushed at the sudden action, but stooped and gently kissed his forehead. The kiss subdued him; he let go her hand, and dropped back into his chair, where he sat very quiet for the rest of my visit, occasionally adding a remark to our chat. I did not stay longer than I could help; for I was sure that the moment I was gone Rhoda would slip down on her knees beside his chair, and he would throw his arms round her, and the demon would be exorcised for this while.

But would it stay away? For it was now clear to me that Professor Lingard believed—or thought that he believed—that his wife had persisted in going to my house this wet afternoon in order to meet Archibald. It would never occur to her that such an idea could have entered his mind, and he would never say it to her, and so the delusion would not be removed. If only I had seen it sooner, I might so easily have made all clear. Perhaps I might yet have an opportunity; but to show the Professor that I perceived his suspicions would be to fix them more firmly in his mind, as he would suppose that at least I saw grounds for them. Oh, what a mess I had made of this after

noon's work! A nice person I was to have in my hands threads wound round other people's hearts!

"Vera Singleton," I summed up, "you are a meddling old mischief-maker!"

IV.

THE rainy spell exhausted itself within the week, and was followed by splendid summer heat. The earth was intoxicated with roses and sunlight, and July reigned in glory.

"Aunt," said Archie solemnly, as he stood by me under the great horse-chestnut; "nobody ought to want to be amused on such a day as this; it ought to be enough for them to be alive."

"And yet, in half an hour, these paltry mortals will be making themselves very hot playing tennis, and seeking solace, not in nature, but in ices."

"Playing tennis to-day is profane," he replied; "I will not countenance it. This is one of Nature's Sundays, and should be observed with due solemnity, and grave rites of joy."

"You have borrowed one of Professor Lingard's moods," I answered, laughing. "I never heard you talk so like him before."

"Would you know the reason why? I expect soon to be his bosom friend and mentor. I've got jolly good news for him, at any rate," returned Archibald, excitedly.

"Have you? Oh, what?"

"You don't suppose I am going to give you the first of it, auntie? No; I will only uncork it for whom it concerns."

"The Professor?"

"Heavens, no! He's a great deal too kittle cattle for me to drive to market; Mrs. Lingard must manage him her own way. I shall tell her; and if her grey eyes don't give that wonderful sudden sparkle, like a flash of sunlight on a mountain pool—why, I shall have missed a pretty effect, that's all. So we'll have another row on the river."

"No, Archie; I can't have all the gossips' tongues of Tamston set wagging by more aquatic expeditions of indefinite duration. If you want the pleasure of telling your news yourself, you must sacrifice something for it. People are to come straight out to the lawn, and will not go through the drawing-room; do you take a book, and sit there quietly, and when I have an opportunity, I will bring Rhoda in. Then you can say whatever has to be said, without attracting notice."

So Archie was established in seclusion; and I prepared to be very diplomatic, and bring this little intrigue—now so near its culminating point—to a happy ending. Everything promised well. The Lingards arrived rather late, when I had disposed of most of my guests, and was at leisure to attend to them. One of Rhoda's

peculiarities was to dislike varieties in dress; having a white cashmere which was suitable for an afternoon party, she saw no occasion for making any change, simply because she had worn it before. Only as the season varied, so did her flowers; and thus her dress carried out that union of repose and variety, which was one of her personal charms. To-day she had ventured on a profusion of roses, in harmony with the sumptuous weather; white, pink, crimson, and yellow—they decked her hat, and twined round her neck, and rested on her bosom; one gorgeous red rose even looped up a fold of her dress. I had never seen her look prettier or livelier, and yet I was not quite satisfied. There seemed something uneasy in the rich flush on her usually delicate cheek, and the brilliancy of her soft eyes, and she watched her husband even more anxiously than usual. He seemed in high spirits, and had brought his racquet, talked and laughed with wonderful animation, and professed himself indifferent to the heat, and longing for a game. It was not very long before he was taking part in one, and Rhoda and I stood and watched the play for a little, until he seemed thoroughly absorbed in it. Nevertheless, I could not divest myself of an uneasy feeling that something was wrong with him, and that Rhoda felt it.

We walked round the garden together, and I told her that Archie had brought her good news, but that he would not tell it to anyone but herself.

"So I have arranged for you to have your talk in the drawing-room, where you will be cool and undisturbed—for you look flushed already, dear."

"Good news! Oh Vera, is it? I am so glad, so thankful; I felt that something was going to happen to-day. Good news! is it really? Oh, how long it is since we have had any!"

She hurried into the drawing-room; but controlled herself, and met Archie with nearly her usual composure. I closed half the window-door after me as I came in, and passed through into the conservatory. Here I worked myself all the year round, and made pets of my flowers and ferns. The latter had an abode of their own, at the further end, a little shady nook, built out from it, with rock-work, and a miniature arch, and a drip of water in its tiny caves. At the same end was a door into the garden, through which I meant to rejoin my guests, without going back into the drawing-room; but first I stepped into the fernery, to remove a shade from my beloved Killarney fern. When the drawing-room should be vacated, I meant to bring up Lady Jacobs to admire its progress.

Just as I was arranging this, I heard a quick but stealthy step on the gravel outside, and in a moment Professor Lingard entered the conservatory, treading quietly in his tennis-shoes. At once he heard the sound of his wife and Archibald's voices inside, and his face changed from eager watchfulness to something demonic. Three or four cat-like strides brought him to the door into the drawing-room

and he crouched down behind it as it stood open, perfectly concealed from the two within. My position was not pleasant. I had been too utterly taken by surprise to stop him in time, and now I could not move without letting him know that he was discovered, and discovering him to Archibald and Rhoda. A nice trap we were all caught in! Those two blissfully ignorant that the Professor was watching them; the Professor never dreaming that I was watching him; and I, the arch-intriguer, not wishing in the least to watch anybody, and yet standing in my Ear of Dionysius, and watching them all. For, by one of those unaccountable accidents which sometimes happen in building, and which our architects seem quite unable to account for or control, the little recess in which I was imprisoned caught every sound from the drawing-room with singular distinctness; and although neither voice was high-pitched, I could hear every word.

"I am afraid," Archie was saying, "that you have thought me slow in doing what I could for your husband's book; but my time is not altogether at my own disposal, and other people's time is not at all, and so the affair has taken what must have seemed to you a long while."

"Of course I could not help being anxious to hear," Rhoda replied; "but I have had enough experience of delays with editors and publishers only to wonder that you have been able to do anything so soon. What is it that you have done?"

"I took the chapter on 'Antiquities' to 'The Archæologist,' and asked the editor (whom I know very well) to look it over as soon as possible. Unluckily, he was just going away for a week, which caused a delay, or you would have had some news sooner. Well, he says it is extremely valuable, erudite, and well-written." (The Professor lifted his head, and I was sure from the expression even of the back of it, that the demoniac look had gone off his face.) "He could not make room for it all, because his paper is not a large one; but he has marked the paragraphs he considers most important, and if he can have those put into the form of two short articles he will gladly publish them."

"Oh, that *is* good," cried Rhoda; "it is the lifting of the cloud!"

"There's more to come," said Archie, triumphantly. "I took 'Climate and Soil' to the 'English Review'—that's a big, new quarterly, you know—and he regularly jumped at it. It will only want just a head and a tail to make it a perfect article for him; it can't be too solid. The bits of description work in splendidly, and keep it from being heavy. He'll want it by the beginning of August. And 'Personal Adventures' will do for my magazine first-rate, if the Professor doesn't mind my editing them a little. They are just a little longer than I can manage, and yet I don't want to lose any of them."

"I don't know how to thank you," Rhoda said, her voice trembling with pleasure. "I can hardly believe such good news, because I had

quite given the whole business up as hopeless ; but I always was sure that my husband's work needed only to be known to be appreciated."

"Yes ; it is nonsense to think, as amateurs generally do, that introductions or influence are any good for selling stuff that is not worth buying. Professor Lingard's information is most valuable, and his style is excellent ; if they had not been what they are, I might have hawked them about for months, and done no good. And if he had sent them in on his own account to the same papers they would have done just as well, only there might have been more delay."

"And yet we failed when we did try."

"Because you did not try the right people, or at the right time. If now, when all these articles have appeared (and I dare say one or two more may be quarried out yet), Professor Lingard will take up his book again, and condense it into moderate dimensions, I expect he will find that the publishers will look at it in a very different fashion. They will have some guarantees for its success, and it will succeed."

"Oh, if it did, I should have nothing left to wish for. But I am sure it will. Now I shall be able to tell my husband all this good news, and it will cheer him up so. It has been a terrible weight on my mind to have this secret from him ; I never had one before. Don't *you* set up secrets when you are married," she ended, with a gay laugh.

"When I am married !" echoed Archie bitterly : "I begin to think I am destined to single cynicism. If so, I shall throw up my present work and go on to the 'Saturday Review.'"

"I hope you will not need to commit that kind of suicide," said Rhoda, with gentle gravity. "I trust to see you some day as happy as I am now. I am sure you, who are so ready to help others, deserve to prosper yourself."

"I don't know what I deserve," Archie answered, with a gloom very unlike him ; "I only know that I have been and fallen in love with the sweetest girl in London, and there is about as much chance of my marrying her as —"

"As there seemed last month of my husband's book being published," laughed Rhoda. "No, you shall not despair ; you scolded me for doing so, and now I will scold you. I feel flooded with hope and joy ; I am floating on it, and I will take you into my boat. Come out, and let us find Edwin ; I am wild to tell him, and then he must talk to you ; you scarcely know each other."

"I hope he will not think me an impertinent meddler, for proposing to cut his book to pieces. Otherwise, I shall be very pleased to improve his acquaintance."

"He will be as grateful to you as I am. Now that you know him partly through his writings, you will be better able to appreciate him than after months of mere social meetings. And I want him to be appreciated. No one really knows what he is and could do but I."

As she spoke, they were moving out to the lawn, and their foot-

steps were lost on the grass. Then I heard a sob. The Professor had hidden his face in his hands. His punishment had come upon him, and the coals of fire were very hot upon his head.

I could scarcely find it in my heart to pity him. How could he for a moment have distrusted that pure heart, beating close to his own for five years? How could he have received her daily tenderness, and still nourished that whispering snake in his soul? Did he not deserve to have meanly spied upon her, only to learn more of the depths of her devotion?

There was silence, in which I softened, as I thought that it was the very sense of all this which was crushing him now, and that at any rate he had suffered worse pain than he had inflicted. Presently he stood up, and went into the drawing-room, almost staggering, and I heard him sink into a chair. This was my opportunity. In my dread of being discovered, I took off my shoes, and succeeded in slipping out and round the corner of the house without making any noise—though not without hurting my feet horribly. I made a détour and entered the drawing-room by the window, making my steps heard first.

"Why, Professor! You are not well, I am sorry to see."

He looked up with a dazed air. "No, I am not well, thank you. Oh yes, I am all right now. Where is my wife?"

"She is looking for you, I think. But do sit still for the present, or lie down. The heat has been too much for you."

"Thank you, I would rather go home, if you will tell me where to find her." He stood up, but had to steady himself by the arm of the chair.

"I will find her for you presently," I said. The one thing that I was anxious about now was to prevent an outpouring of penitence to Rhoda. She would forgive him anything, but she was too proud and sensitive ever to be able to forget that she had been doubted.

"Do sit down here quietly in the cool," I resumed, "and let me wait to fetch her until you are more yourself. She will be alarmed if she sees you in this state."

"She will not be alarmed; I cannot wait. I must see her: I want to tell her——"

"You do not want to tell her anything that will distress her, I hope," I said severely.

He was silent.

"Rhoda is very strong and loving," I went on, "but she is very sensitive. Because she can bear pain, you think that she does not feel it. Something has been troubling her for these last three weeks, and I have been grieved to see that it was so."

"Has she been troubled?" he interrupted, eagerly. "Have I given her pain?"

"Something has given her great pain, Professor Lingard; you best know what. She has not told me."

"It is I," he said, brokenly, sitting down again. "I: nobody else."

"If it is so, will you not refrain from hurting her more?"

"I never will—never again. My own true, loving darling!"

"Then you must be silent and self-controlled now. If you pour out your feelings to Rhoda, you will give her a wound from which she may never recover. She has no suspicion of the wrong that your thoughts have done her; she never must suspect it, or you will insult her afresh."

There was a long pause, and then he answered: "You are quite right, Mrs. Singleton; I will take your advice. Now, if you please, I will look for my wife." He spoke in a composed and manly tone, and stood up again.

Just then Rhoda rushed in, alone.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Edwin, and then I heard that you had been unwell, and given up your game, so I guessed you were indoors. One of your dreadful headaches, I see. Poor dear! is it very bad?"

She knelt beside him, and placed one hand on his forehead. He seemed unable to speak, but put his arm round her, and rested his head on her shoulder. She laid her cheek softly upon his hot forehead. The Professor's eyes were closed, but I saw two tears steal from under their lids.

I slipped quietly away.

V.

THERE is not much more to tell. After that day, everything went on with smoothness. Professor Lingard called upon Archibald in due form on Monday, the latter having honoured me with an additional day's visit, in order to "see the thing through." I was not present at the interview, thinking it better to keep out of the Professor's way just then; but it went off well. He thanked Archibald with all the graceful courtesy which he could so easily command, and entered into the discussion of details in a practical and business-like manner. So, at least, I gathered, as my nephew pronounced him a far more sensible fellow than he had thought, and a thorough gentleman.

In process of time all the articles came out, as well as another upon the Cypriotes themselves, and their various characteristics. It was delightful to see how the Lingards flourished on their small successes. The Professor seemed to grow taller and carry himself straighter with every time that he saw his name in print; he was always busy now, preparing something for the press, and had no time to be unwell. Archibald put it into a well-known publisher's head to bring out a Handy Book on Cyprus; and the Professor, whose spirits were rising high, actually went himself to interview the great man, and offer to write it. In spite of Archie's declarations of the uselessness of influence, I am pretty sure that he exerted a little; at

any rate, the Professor got the work, and did it well and rapidly. His name was now known in connection with the subject, and he ventured to take up once more the great book itself. Being by this time well accustomed to cutting and fitting, he reduced it to reasonable dimensions without (I believe) unbearable pangs; and it actually made its appearance. He did not make much by it, I think; but it got some good reviews, had a fair sale, and brought him in something. He and Rhoda cared little about the money; they were perfectly happy to see it in print, and know that it was read.

All this literary work extended Professor Lingard's connections, and increased his acquaintances; so that he did not become a monomaniac about Cyprus, but took up other subjects, and did other classes of work. He never relapsed into his old, dispirited condition; and though he did not accomplish anything very great, or reach any extended fame, he became in his quiet way a distinguished man, who never undertook what he could not do, did well whatever he undertook, and was highly thought of in a small circle.

Rhoda bloomed out into redoubled beauty, and for the first time I saw what she was like when not under a cloud. I did not wonder at the Professor's having fallen helplessly in love with her. He is more in love with her than ever now, I think; especially since, having got the *Magnum Opus* off her mind, she has had time to turn her attention to perpetuating the name of Lingard in other ways. He spends half his time in contemplating the Result in its cradle, and writing poetry about it; but when out of that safe retreat, he is desperately afraid of it.

Archibald is Baby's godfather, and is always a welcome guest at Cyprus Lawn. I am godmother, and am curiously fond of the queer little atom; but I make my visits when the Professor is likely to be safe in his study. For, although he is always studiously polite to me, our friendship has cooled since that memorable Saturday in July. I know that the sight of me reminds him of the one episode in his life of which he is bitterly ashamed, and which he would forget if he could. I can easily forgive him, and was not surprised that he did not care that summer to come to any more of my Saturdays. But he always sent his wife, when he could induce her to leave him, especially when Archibald was to be there.

VERA SINGLETON.



IN THE CLOISTER.

In the old monastic garden,
Where the shadows come and go,
Pace, in holy meditation,
Sandalled brothers to and fro.

*Twixt the rows of sunflowers, leaning
To their god each burning heart,
Past sweet herb and shrub, revealing
Token of the healing art.

Some in lofty contemplation,
Watch the sunset colours red,
Over breviary and missal,
Bendeth many a cowed head.

Abbey walls shut out the tumult
Of the world—its strife and din;
Passionless and even beateth
Heart and pulse those walls within.

When the ponderous gates closed on them,
Human life was left without,
Human love and human feeling,
Memory—all were blotted out.

So at least the Church has willed it,
But the heart is stronger still,
And hath deeper needs implanted
Than her narrow creed can fill.

See the monk through yonder grating,
In his solitary cell,
Lifting yearning prayers to Heaven;
All his troubles who can tell?

Was it then for this, O Father,
Orphaned, desolate to be,
That I gave up Love, Home, Beauty?
Yet I feel no nearer Thee.

Here in cloistered cell I thought me
Heaven to find, and Peace and Rest;
But here, too, hath sin dominion,
And a home in monkish breast.

Softly through the gathering twilight
Rings the Angelus to prayer,
And an Angel's wing, in passing,
Seems to stir the dusky air.

Through the chapel windows streaming
Floods of music drown his soul;
Holy chant and swelling anthem
Make the wounded spirit whole.

"Come, O come, ye heavy laden,"
'Tis to thee, poor monk, addressed;
"Come," ring on ye seraph voices—
"Come, and I will give you rest."

IN THE BLACK FOREST.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"ROUND ABOUT NORWAY," &c.

THE Rhine Falls were left to astonish other eyes and ears with their rush and roar, and once more I was journeying towards the Black Forest, taking a long round, and making yet another violent effort to see the Wehrthal. Success would depend very much upon the elements, but come fair weather or come foul, I had determined to see this much-praised valley. A rash resolve.

The train made its slow way to Basle; how slow and how wearisome only those know who have passed through the experience. Travelling for pleasure, these frequent stoppages and long halts are endurable; but to anyone hastening on matters of life or death all this delay and loss of time must be torture.

At Basle we changed for the Black Forest. The train was crowded, and passengers were packed together regardless of class: not the most comfortable arrangement in the world. The summer manoeuvres were going forward, and every station was thronged with noisy Germans. Countrymen dressed in their Sunday best, and looking stiff and uncomfortable; half of them carrying glaring umbrellas tied round like lettuces. They scrambled, any number into any carriage, and the train groaned with its extra weight. The day was intensely hot and bright, but I had learned wisdom of late, and did not expect too much. There is no mesmerism in these matters. It is said that to wish for a person will often bring him, but it is not so with blue skies.

We reached Schopfheim, a small, industrious manufacturing town. Here I was glad to say good-bye to the train, which continued its slow way towards Zell, another industrious manufacturing town, overshadowed by the mountains. Zell was nearer my destination, but a fellow traveller (above the Sunday-best and cotton-umbrella order) said there would be greater chance of finding a carriage for Schönau at Schopfheim than at Zell.

So I alighted; and the guard, more civil and human than the Schluchsee diligence-conductor had been to the unprotected lady travelling to Höchenschwand, put out my luggage at Schopfheim, though it was labelled for Zell. Next, my fellow traveller piloted me through the not very intricate mazes leading from the station to the inn of the Three Kings, where he seemed quite at home. In a moment the host and hostess bustled out with effusion (they were honest, straightforward folk), and assured me that a horse and carriage, everything the inn contained, was at my disposal.

After this wholesale invitation, it seemed almost ungrateful merely to accept a glass of their country ale and a crust of bread ; certainly it was unremunerative ; but I am bound to say that an extensive order for ambrosia and nectar could not have been served with more evidence of goodwill. Whilst the carriage was preparing, I strolled out to reconnoitre the town and take its bearings.

It contained nothing remarkable. A small, uninteresting place, of no form or shape ; no sign of fashion, or of anything beyond trade and very small commerce ; nothing old or antiquated about it, except the distant hills ; too distant to overshadow the houses or lend them anything of a romantic influence. In a quiet way the



WEHRATHAL.

people appeared flourishing and industrious. There were no conspicuous signs of poverty ; for the bare-legged children, who played in the gutters, and arrested their intense enjoyment of wallowing in the dust of the road to stare after the stranger, were no evidence of anything but the good habits of the country : bare legs and feet and arms, whereby they grow up stout and hardy for the battle of the world.

Before the mild excitement and resources of Schopfheim were exhausted, I perceived at the door of the Three Kings an indescribable vehicle in readiness. The landlord, a model of patience and good humour, was watching over it with evident pride and affection.

On closer inspection, this wonderful machine proved a kind of Bath chair on a large scale, with a narrow seat in front for the driver and a ledge behind for the luggage. But it was not uncomfortable ;

and if the state of the springs made it a matter for rejoicing that one's bones are not very easily dislocated, still things might have been worse. The wheels, at least, were round and not square. With the aid of the shaggy but willing quadruped we should gradually make way, and sooner or later reach Schönau.

So it came to pass. The landlord, with a sort of paternal solicitude, packed me up bag and baggage, gave a proud and parting look to his vehicle and his little horse, wished me a safe journey (I thought I here detected a slight anxiety in his tone, but probably it was fancy), and away we started. The majesty of Phaeton driving his chariot was nothing as compared with our pomp and pride on this



HEBEL'S HOME.

occasion. Nevertheless, I cannot say that we dashed through the town at headlong speed, scattering people and raising an alarm. The horse, on the contrary, seemed particularly gentle. Moreover, he had distinguished ideas, and felt that a leisurely pace was due to his dignity, and that nothing was more vulgar than to be seen in a hurry. If ever he had had a youth, it must certainly have been in the Middle Ages.

But the evening was unusually fine, and our time was our own—carriage, horse, driver, and driven: a quartette accountable to no man. Jehu, too, enlivened the journey with intelligent remarks. His wonders about England, and what it could be like; the great city of London with its millions of people—and was it true that its streets were paved with gold? The anecdotes and histories of his own immediate neighbourhood and its inhabitants, himself included.

He, poor fellow, had come down in the world. He had been a gentleman's coachman for many years; had saved a good bit of money. Then, marrying a wife, he thought he should like a home of his own, and with his savings set up a café. Alas, he had forgotten that a cobbler should stick to his last, or else he had not seized his fortune at the flood, for in two years all was lost. So he had returned to his old occupation, and had come down to the stables of the Three Kings. He had not much hope left for himself, he plaintively said, but he had great hopes that his son would do something in the world, and build up their fortunes once more.

It was a pleasant country drive, calm and placid, nothing wild or great or grand about it. Fields and vineyards and lovely orchards surrounded us. The mountains were gradually drawing nearer. Presently we turned out of our road to visit Hausen, a small village, and the home of Hebel, the poet; who, in a lesser degree, was to the people of the Black Forest what Burns was to the Scotch.

This visit left behind it one of the pleasantest impressions the Black Forest gave me. It was a bright, calm evening, and especially calm and silent was the village. A quaint corner house, nothing more than a humble cottage, bore an inscription intimating that here for a time had been the poet's home. Across the road was the small church, and under its shadow, and guarded by trees, was a monument erected by the people to the poet's memory.

Standing there, this still evening, it all seemed a type of Hebel's life. The quiet fields and fruit-laden orchards; the grand, surrounding hills in which he often wandered, and from which he must have drawn much of his inspiration; the running stream on whose borders he would lounge and dream away the hours, and write down his songs as they occurred to him.

It was just the spot for a poet whose tone of mind was calm and smooth-flowing, rather than wild and passionate. And yet, during the time that he lived amongst poor and, comparatively speaking, ignorant villagers, there must have been for ever in his life an under-current of sadness—a feeling of being very much alone in the world; incapable of being understood and appreciated by his nearest and closest companions; a constant craving for communion with a higher order of intelligence and culture, a more elevated social sphere, where the thoughts within him, that had now to be suppressed, might find utterance and response; a reciprocity of ideas and emotions and intimate companionship that is all in all to some natures, and without which life would have no sunshine.

It was doubtless this feeling that made him spend so much of his time wandering about the hills, in silent communion with the Nature he loved so well. Here, at least, there was nothing to jar upon him; nothing to wound his sensitive spirit; no rough response where the opposite should have been; no loud laugh where sympathy was demanded.

We left Hausen to its repose, and went on our way. Soon we passed through Zell, a small, old-fashioned, out-of-the-world spot, with a few tall chimnies and iron works. I thought I had done well to leave the train at Schopfheim and secure a carriage (such a carriage, too!) at the Three Kings. Here, in the valley of the Wiesen, we found ourselves very much amongst the mountains. To the left ran the narrow, shallow babbling stream. The road now presented the usual Black Forest features. Sloping hills breaking into chains; dark pine woods; well made but desolate roads; few signs of life, except occasional wayside inns or houses. When night was beginning to fall, the mountains closed in and the valley narrowed. The stream rushed on more turbulently, as if angry at having its space contracted; the scene grew somewhat wild and grand; two or three houses opened up, with windows already lighted, as if to greet us; yet a little further, and Schönauf, reposing in a hollow and surrounded by mountains, was reached.

The inn was primitive, but the landlord was intelligent, and spoke excellent French—a somewhat rare occurrence in the more remote spots of the Black Forest. I gathered from his conversation that he had been born to better things. The rooms were large and well furnished, and it was all much better than could have been expected up amongst the mountains.

For it seemed very much out of the world indeed. Yet it was so beautifully situated, with all the surrounding hills sloping about—under the very shadow of the great Belchen itself—that I felt one could be happy here for a whole week, exploring the neighbourhood. It abounds in mountain excursions; in walks where hour after hour you may lose yourself in the woods in mazes of wild tangle, flowers and briar; in paths and roads untrodden by the ordinary tourist, and delightfully secluded, where the sense of freedom and beauty is revelled in to the very utmost. For it is something to wander out of the beaten track. You gain, in a minor degree, that feeling of exploration, of separation from the world and mankind, from the postman and the immediate neighbour, that must form one of the great charms of the prairies of the New World.

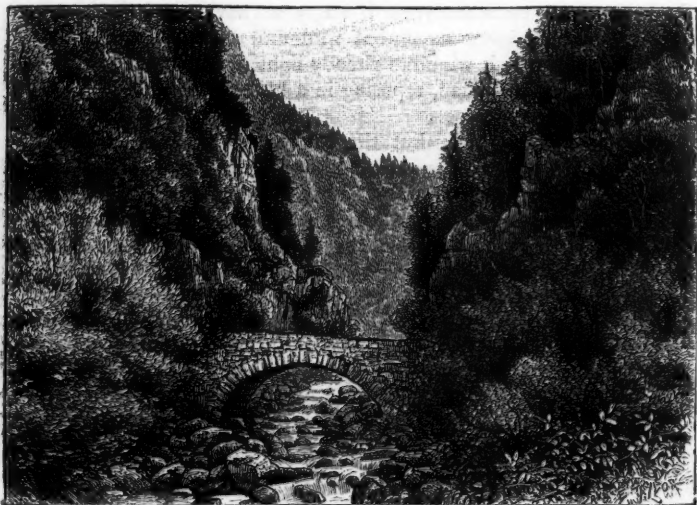
In the twilight I wandered up amongst the mountains, which looked so desolate they might have led to the ends of the earth. Down a mountain path there came a cluster of young men and women, returning from their day's work, singing choruses that made the hills ring again to the echo. The gathering gloom warned me that I also should do well to return. It would be no hard matter to miss one's way up here; and a night in the mountain would be neither comfortable nor agreeable.

Schönauf itself is a small but not altogether unimportant place. Wandering about it that night, the streets totally unlighted, it looked weird and uncanny. Some of the thoroughfares were composed entirely of cottages, that, in the darkness, seemed black and broken

with age. Streets of deserted ruins, perfect wrecks they looked, neither light nor sound to be seen or heard. Evidently the people of Schönau were early folk.

On returning to the inn, the landlord said it was the night on which their musical club assembled. He was afraid the sweet sounds might nevertheless prove a discordant element to slumbers, as they might be kept up rather late. My room was just over the music room—should he put me a floor higher? But in this primitive place surely all sounds, musical or otherwise, would cease by eleven o'clock, and I decided to stay where I was.

I had reckoned without my host. The moments passed, but not



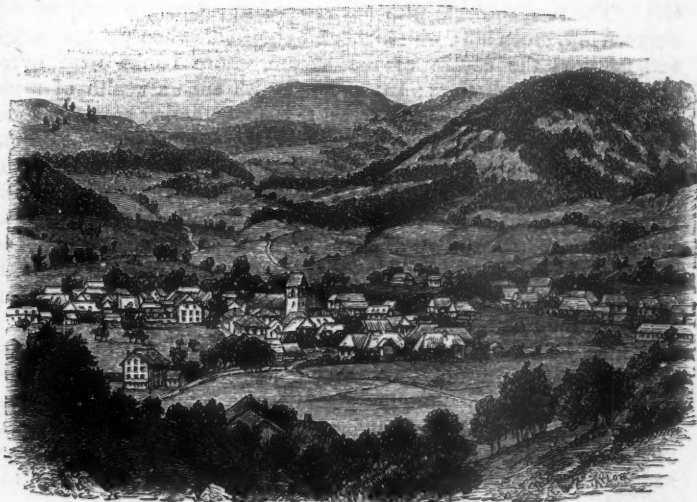
WEHRATHAL.

the music. To do them justice, it was an excellent performance. The president, who alone touched the piano, went through some of Wagner's most difficult compositions with the skill of a master. When not playing a solo, he was accompanying the others in part-songs, well sung, certainly, but putting an end to all repose. If I could by any possibility have hated music it would have been that night. Most devoutly I wished that St. Cecilia, reversing the order of things, would strike the lyre and draw all these angels upwards.

Until between two and three in the morning the performance never ceased. Then the piano was shut down with a determined hand, and the "Gesellschaft" drifted out into the night. I saw them file off in ones, like a string of musical turkeys—for I had long since sought my window in despair, and watched for St. Cecilia amongst the stars. The house was left to peace and quietness. But

of what use, now that the dawn in faintest glimmer was creeping up into the eastern sky? The "*Gesellschaft*" might as well have gone on discoursing sweet sounds until breakfast, for sleep and rest had taken flight.

The next morning the landlord apologised for the lateness of the performance. Never was apology less out of place. But he explained that one of the company (the player who had so charmed me in spite of all) was going away on a long absence—perhaps even for ever. Why, in the name of wonder, could mine host not have given me this information last night? Irritated nerves would have been soothed, excuses made. I would even have sat up and taken part in these



SCHÖNAU.

"midnight orgies," and joined in their harmonies; in the end have passed round the loving cup and speeded the parting guest. No; things are left unsaid; explanations are not forthcoming; and it is all the fault of stupid people who will not speak at the right moment. The rough, that might have been so smooth, remains rough; the crooked is never made straight. All for the want of a few words in the right place. Verily, we miss our opportunities and live our lives as if they were all to come twice over; not as if each passing sunset brought us nearer that day when the pulse must cease to beat, the heart, with all its emotions, must be stilled for ever.

That morning, when the faint dawn in the east had given place to broad day, I found my way to the breakfast-room and to the apologies of mine host. What could be said in return? Only that the next night I would accept his offer and ascend a stage in the world.

Before eight o'clock a carriage, with as strong and brisk a pair of horses as I had seen in the Black Forest, stood at the door. And here I would counsel the reader to take, on all possible occasions, in this district, a small carriage where a large one is not needed. It is more agreeable; you travel more quickly; as a rule the springs are in better condition and dislocation is less imminent; and, strongest consideration of all, it saves the horses.

I started for the Wehrthal. This time at least it should be done; it remained to be proved whether it would be seen also. The morning was not promising. It did not rain, but the clouds were low and threatening.

It was a lovely drive, and with sunshine would have been perfect. The road to begin with was steep and rugged; a sharp ascent between low, green hills, with higher hills beyond. Then we descended and followed the course of the stream, whose banks were overshadowed by small trees; banks lined with such a wealth of moss and wild flowers and delicate ferns, that in gathering specimens the carriage was for ever running on out of sight. Thus we went on for some time, until we came to a pass on the left leading up to Todtnau, a small place in the mountains, 2,000 feet above the sea level, with manufactories of paper and cotton. Its beauties to-day had to remain unexplored, and we continued our way, reaching presently the village of Todtmoos, with its pilgrim church, all buried in the hills. At the primitive inn we halted awhile to rest the horses; and on leaving it the rain began to fall.

A little below this, at Todtmoos Au, began the greater beauty of the Wehrthal. In full sunshine no doubt it would have proved worthy of all its reputation, but the rain was coming down, and the clouds hung about the mountain tops; white mists that wreathed themselves into fantastic forms, and rolled, snake-like, about the trees, and crept and crawled onwards and upwards, and seemed to gather strength and volume as they went—always a bad sign.

Yet in spite of all, the beauty of the Wehrthal was evident, and beyond doubt. When, every now and then, the clouds lifted and the rain condensed to cease, one saw how grand and lovely it would all be under blue skies. The valley was very narrow; just room enough for the road and the rushing stream; an accumulation of wood and rock and loveliest green. The mountains towered on both sides; here barren, and standing out like the ruins of castles that might have been there since the commencement of the ages, magnificent and hoary; there covered with glorious pines and still more luxuriant verdure to the very summits; trees fringing the sky in delicate, lace-like outlines.

The road wound about the mountains, so that we were constantly opening up fresh views, never seeing very much of the valley at one time; an effect that so greatly increases the magical beauty of scenery. Never to know quite what may come next: a fresh

surprise, a new and delightful sensation at every turn. Now we followed one bank of the stream, and now, crossing an old stone bridge, skirted the other. All the time the water ran and frothed and appeared to sing for joy at its beautiful home; and we seemed to race with it. The willing horses wanted no urging, but with a small carriage and a light weight, fancied themselves out for a holiday, and went careering down the valley at full speed.

But between the Wehrathal and the Albthal (they are often brought into comparison, and each has its supporters), there is this difference:

In the Albthal the road runs far up the mountain side. You are elevated and look down constantly from a height more or less considerable. You gaze from deep, precipitous banks into a river running far below at the bottom of the wild pass or ravine. You seem to be above it all, to command all; a sense of wings, of soaring, takes possession of you. There is a great deal of rugged wildness and grandeur. You have far-reaching views of extraordinary beauty; mountain after mountain covered with forest trees; a wealth of wood and verdure, sufficient, one would think, to supply the world with all its needs for the next age to come. The road, running beside the steep, wild precipice, is diversified by tunnels cut out of the solid rock. In spite of so much elevation, still the pine-clad mountains rise towering above you; but here they slope outwards, so that the upper portion of the valley is expansive: only from the road downwards does it contract into a wild ravine.

The Wehrathal, on the other hand, has none of this wild, savage grandeur. There is no looking into great depths, which always gives a far stronger sense of the sublime and the splendid than looking upwards from the depth itself. Here the road is for ever on a level with the stream. The rush of the water is every now and then almost a disturbing element in one's journey. From this depth we gaze up into the wealth of wood and verdure of the mountains that tower and almost meet on the right hand and on the left. They are beautiful exceedingly; but it is a softer beauty than that of the Albthal: the green is not confined exclusively to pine trees. I saw it under every disadvantage; the weather was almost as bad as those three days passed at Wehr in hopeless expectancy. This had to be taken into consideration. But when all due allowance was made, the Albthal seemed infinitely more impressive than the Wehrathal.

Human nature happily embraces every variety of taste and sentiment; the sublime to one mind will be a matter of indifference to another. Therefore, whilst some might prefer the rugged grandeur of the Albthal, others might find greater enjoyment in the gentler influence of the Wehrathal, whose beauties also often touch the sublime point. But though I thought that the two valleys could not be compared, yet undoubtedly the Wehrathal yields the palm only to the Albthal. Both should be seen, and he who neglects either, misses two of the choicest, loveliest spots in the Black Forest.

The little horses made good way, and dashed downwards. We passed out of the valley into more open country, and in a few moments entered the small town of Wehr, where, last week, the little coterie had been weather-bound. Waking the echoes of the quiet street, the people came to their doors and windows, and recognising a familiar face, seemed disposed to greet it as an old friend. But there was something "stagey" in it all. I had disappeared down one end of the place; I reappeared up the other. Who was to guess the long round by road and rail that had led to this species of trap-door sensation? Perseverance surmounts obstacles; but, alas, it evidently would not control the weather.



SCHÖNAUF.

Once more at the little Hotel Brügger, out came the landlady with hands uplifted in astonishment at so much perseverance, so little good fortune. But if I would take the trouble to enter, at least if I could not have blue skies I should have a good dinner. It is surprising what a consolation for many ills this appears to be to a large proportion of mankind. To many who serve and to many who are served, a good dinner is the Ultima Thule of existence.

So the hostess set about her work, and put herself on her mettle, which all ended in a very creditable result. And even as blessings, any more than misfortunes, do not come singly, in less than ten minutes from the time of entering the house, the clouds drifted and the sun came out with full power. We should have a fine afternoon, after all, said Frau Brügger; the drive up the Wehrathal would be magnificent. Remembering her false prophecies of last week, I

doubted, and took her present assurance, like her excellent dishes, with a grain of salt.

After a rest of more than two hours, Jehu came round with his equipage, and away we went again ; this time bidding a final farewell to Wehr. Once more the sky had clouded ; once more, at the very entrance of the valley, down came the rain. There was no other choice than to bear it ; no alternative. On we went, this time constantly ascending, and making slow progress. But at length we passed the foundry of Todtmoos Au, and reached Todtmoos itself, with its pilgrim church and primitive inn. Here we were glad enough to escape for an hour's shelter. The driver, like all sensible mortals in like condition, went in for hot coffee and a deep, deep draught, not of rich Rhine wine, but of kirschwasser. For this latter decoction, or distillation, these Black Forest drivers have a capacity as surprising as it is inexhaustible.

At the end of the hour (oh, kindly clouds, how soon we forget the miseries you cause us, the beauties you withhold !) the rain ceased, and we continued on our journey with fresh hopes and aspirations.

And now, to vary our route, we turned off to the left up into the mountains. It was a lovely, desolate way. Here one truly felt in the very heart of the forest. The woods were on each side, and the road seemed merely a clearance cut through them ; we could see far into their depths ; long, green aisles, thick clumps and clusters ; mazes of delicious ferns and flowers, moss and tangle. Up and up we ascended, until at length we found ourselves in the very clouds, then above them, whilst they covered the prospect before us like a sea.

It was a strange sight, an exquisite delusion. But I longed to see the weather clear, so that the whole of this evidently magnificent panorama might stretch out in all its beauty. Open sesame ! Even as I longed and wished, like a great scroll the mist rolled rapidly away, and in a distance of some two hundred yards the whole obstructing vapour had been left behind.

The effect was magical. We were now on a level with the tops of the mountains ; the climb had been steep and somewhat long. Before us lay an immense panorama of green, smiling valley and verdant, fertile plain, and far-off wooded hills. Villages reposed here and there ; streams ran their course. It is one of the most striking and most varied views in the Black Forest. Now we began to descend into the valley ; a long pass, steep as the ascent had been. Cows and goats browsed on the hillsides, looking like flies clinging to a wall, mere animated dots in the landscape. Down and down we went ; first overhanging the valley, then gradually reaching the level, and leaving the tops of the hills far, far above us. The road was now long and circuitous, shut in by the mountains. We passed wayside villages, small and primitive, where wood-choppers kept time to the sound of the rushing stream. Halted at a wayside inn ; ostensibly

to refresh the horses, really to invigorate the driver, who so praised the kirschwasser to the skies, that I was tempted to take the glass humbly handed by the landlord. It was distilled poison.

However, on coachman and horses the short rest and refreshment had the desired effect. They went forward with renewed energy; and, soon after, we launched out upon the Wiesenthal, the road travelled yesterday from Schopfheim.

But the Angenbachthal, now left behind, was certainly one of the most delightful, one of the most primitive and refreshing in the Black Forest. Whether travelling by carriage, or whether on a walking tour, it will equally enchant those who are fortunate enough not to pass it by. To the pedestrian especially it presents attractions, for he may wander into the by-paths at his own sweet will, may lose himself in the mazes of the forest, and luxuriate in all this not only solitary, but comparatively untrodden ground. He will revel in lovely specimens of ferns and flowers, even though it may be but to tread them under foot. And he may hold converse, now and again, with a primitive, simple-minded woodcutter, for whom the world is but a name, the destiny of nations an unknown problem, and the law of progress not even a mystery. And he may dream and dream away the moments, and fancy himself in the Forest Primeval.

(To be concluded.)



"Puisque tu sais chanter, ami, tu sais pleurer."—

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

To me sad moments bring
This heart-thought deep :
"He who knows how to sing
Knows how to weep."

Yet though deep sorrow lies
Upon my breast,
And though these weeping eyes
Not yet may rest ;

This other thought as deep
The angels bring :
He who knows how to weep
Knows how to sing.

A. M. H.

UGLY AND STUPID.

BY JANE GREY.

"LADY FLORA has a headache, and cannot act to-night! Gracious goodness! What are we to do? The airs these fine ladies give themselves is simply abominable."

The energy with which these words were uttered would have led a listener to suppose that the speaker was a radical merchant from one of the manufacturing towns in the north, instead of being one of the richest, handsomest, idlest, and most universally-petted young men in London, who generally assumed a blasé air of liking nothing, though occasionally, as at the present moment, the natural excitability of his nature would assert itself.

"If you are so severe," said one of the two pretty women he addressed, and who was his hostess, "we won't any of us act, and then where will you be?"

"Freed from a dilemma. If none of you acted, the thing would have to be thrown up. You would really oblige me by carrying out that threat."

"As we don't wish to oblige you," she retorted, laughing, "we won't carry it out, though I am afraid after so much unusual excitement on your part you will be too exhausted to act yourself. It was so unnecessary too, as we have found a substitute for Lady Flora. Miss Manners will take the part."

"Miss Manners?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes. Now don't pretend you don't know who I mean. You took her in to dinner last night."

"Oh! That girl. My dear Mrs. Burnes, she is so ugly and so stupid! And though it is a small part, that any fool could take, still it does require a certain amount of intelligence."

"As you hardly uttered a word to her the while," began the other lady, but broke off abruptly: for on the utterance of his paradoxical statement the young man turned round to find the object of it close behind him; so close that it was impossible to hope she had not heard every word.

Arthur Hamilton was not given to embarrassment, but at this moment he was absolutely speechless. Miss Manners was not handsome, perhaps, but her dignified self-possession under these trying circumstances proved her to be a woman of character, if not of brilliant intellect, and a slight flush on her sallow face showed that her self-possession was not the result of stolid stupidity. With scarcely a pause she took up the thread of the conversation.

"Lady Flora seems certain that she will not be able to act to-night.

It appears that there is no one available to fill her place but me. I never have acted, but I fancy in so small a part I can scarcely do much harm. I suppose it is not very difficult?" she added, appealing to Arthur, with a quiet unconcern, in which it would have needed a very keen observer to have detected the malice. And Arthur was, as he afterwards said, too "completely staggered" to detect anything. "Oh no, it's not very difficult," he stammered, and muttering something about the last touches to the stage, he escaped.

"Poor Mr. Hamilton! this sudden caprice on the part of Lady Flora is rather hard on him as stage manager," said Miss Manners, as he left the room.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Burnes, vaguely; "but we must leave you in peace to learn your part. We have a final rehearsal after luncheon." And she and Mrs. Finsbury departed, hardly less glad than Arthur to make their escape.

Gertrude Manners stood for a moment, with a half bitter, half disdainful smile on her face, but something like tears in her eyes. Then she walked to the fire-place and took a deliberate survey of her features in the glass over the chimney-piece. She was not handsome, but a close observer would hardly have sat beside her all through a long dinner, and decided that she was ugly. Her large hazel eyes were variable in their shades as the sea under an April sky, her whole face was expressive and mobile; moreover, her figure was tall and graceful. Nevertheless, she did not appear conscious of these advantages; for, after a moment of keen scrutiny, she sighed and said, half aloud, as she turned away, "Well, I am plain, but—" she glanced at the play-book in her hand, and a bright, confident smile broke over her face—"we shall see."

At three o'clock the Corps Dramatique assembled on the stage. It consisted of the hostess, Mrs. Burnes, a clever, piquante little woman, Mrs. Finsbury, one of the beauties of the day, Gertrude Manners, Arthur, who played the hero, besides being stage manager and general director, Mr. Finsbury, and two somewhat vapid young men, whose ideas of acting were of the most misty kind, but who took any amount of snubbing and tutoring with perfect good temper. Gertrude's part was that of heroine, in so far as that she was the hero's lady love; but she had little to do, beyond standing about, perhaps the most difficult thing of all to do gracefully, and to make a few tender speeches to Arthur, which she did in much the same tone as a child learning to read. Arthur's artistic soul was too much for him, and forgetting all awkward circumstances, he exclaimed, "This will never do, Miss Manners. Can't you be more empressée, more tender, as if you worshipped the very ground I tread on?" and, looking into her face to give emphasis to his words, he found it lit up with suppressed laughter.

"I am afraid I am not a good enough actress for that," she replied quietly.

At half-past eight the drawing-room was filled to overflowing. The curtain had risen, and the play proceeded most satisfactorily.

Arthur quite justified the eulogiums that were indiscriminately heaped upon him. Mr. Finsbury, as the heavy swell, was painstaking and accurate, if a little heavier than was absolutely necessary. The vapid young men, one as the villain, the other as supplementary hero, acquitted themselves creditably enough. The hostess kept the audience genuinely amused by her *cléver* impersonation of a scheming widow, while Mrs. Finsbury made so fair a picture in her every attitude, that her lack of histrionic power was readily forgiven by the spectators.

And Gertrude? Gertrude, carefully got up by good-natured Mrs. Finsbury, really did, with the aid of darkened eye-lashes, rouge, powder, and becomingly-arranged hair, look almost pretty. She had little to say, but was on the stage a good deal; and here her natural self-possession stood her in good stead: she was perfectly at her ease. But beyond this, she contrived to throw into every word and gesture the expression of her deep interest in the hero. She followed the dialogue, her face betraying every emotion that it called up. In a word, she not only made something, but a good deal out of her part; made herself one of the objects of interest in the piece; and once, in uttering the conventional protestations of undying affection to her lover, she clasped her hands on his arm, looking into his face with a passionate fervour of which she was herself unconscious, her eyes glowing, her lips quivering, her face and voice expressing such an intensity of devotion, that Arthur was startled into forgetting his answer.

It was over. Dancing was the next event on the programme, and people danced and talked it over in the complimentary style usual on such occasions. "How good Mr. Hamilton was." "How lovely Mrs. Finsbury looked." "How cleverly Mrs. Burnes acted." But one and all were honestly enthusiastic over Gertrude. "She is a born actress." "She was wonderful." "It was so clever of her to make so much of that small part." And to each and all Gertrude returned the same quiet smile of thanks. Arthur received his laurels with less than his usual easy self-complacency. He was distraught and even irritable. He was the only person in the house who did not congratulate Gertrude on her success. He never went near her. At the end of the evening, however, when nearly everyone not of the house party was gone, and two more dances must close the entertainment, he found himself close to Gertrude. He glanced at her, and, with a hesitation that those who knew him best would have supposed him incapable of, asked her to dance. All her rouge and eye-black washed off, she was once more to most people a *sallow*, uninteresting girl. But he could not forget those deep, earnest eyes, the intense fervour of her voice, the passionate emo-

tion expressed in her gesture. Even now, looking at her face, he said to himself that her eyes were beautiful. If she loved would they so deepen, and her tones take that thrilling tenderness? He roused himself from these speculations, which he reflected were foolish, to listen to her words, which were commonplace enough, and uttered in tones not the least thrilling or tender, though they were clear and soft, as he might have discovered the night before at dinner, if he had chosen to notice it. He remarked it now, however, and connected them indissolubly with the passion they were capable of expressing.

"Do you know you are a born actress," he said, when at last they arrived at the inevitable subject of the theatricals.

She smiled, not without a suspicion of triumph in her eyes.

"I don't know that exactly, but I have always felt sure I could act."

"Then how is it that you have never tried before?"

"I suppose it never occurred to anyone to suppose me capable of acting."

"The people you have lived with must have been fools."

She looked at him and laughed, after which his share in the conversation was confined to monosyllables.

And yet she bore him no malice. Through the days that followed she accepted his attentions with perfect ease and composure, was always agreeable and amiable, and never seemed the least aware that any notice from the fastidious and much-admired Arthur Hamilton was a great honour. No deeper intention on his part ever occurred to her.

The party had broken up. There was no one left but Arthur, Gertrude and her father. Arthur entering the drawing-room about five o'clock found Gertrude there alone, kneeling on the hearthrug reading by the fire, for the daylight had failed and the lamps had not yet been brought. The flickering flames threw a rosy glow on her face, and lent an unwonted lustre to her hair; her attitude was graceful; altogether she made a pretty picture. To his eyes so pretty a one that he paused to look at her with so much earnestness, that he was quite startled when, becoming conscious, she looked up and spoke. He was at once seized with the sense of discomfiture that always assailed him in her presence, and which was the more uncomfortable from being a sensation to which he was quite unaccustomed.

She, on the contrary, was perfectly cool, and not the least aware that he was not.

"How dreary it always is," she remarked, "to be the last remnant of a large party."

"Yes," he said absently; then added hesitatingly: "You are not going to-morrow, are you? I heard Mrs. Burnes ask your father to stay."

"She did ask us, but we cannot manage it. We are positively going to-morrow."

"You are—I—I wonder if I shall ever see you again."

"I don't know," she said indifferently. "The world is very small. It is curious how one does knock up against people."

"One does—Yes—Certainly—Miss Manners, in case I never should see you again, will you overlook the shortness of our acquaintance and let me tell you something."

"Certainly," she said, with a slight accent of surprise.

"I—I don't know whether I ought to allude to it, but I must begin by doing so. I know you must have heard something I said of you, something utterly idiotic and senseless, like the fool I was, but ——"

"Yes," she interrupted, quietly; "we need not go back to that now."

"If you knew," he went on unheeding, "how bitterly I have regretted that foolish speech, how utterly I retract it, how, however I might, in my ignorant presumption, have chosen to regard you then, you are to me now the one woman in the world, your face the most beautiful, your every attribute the most perfect. It is now the most earnest hope I ever entertained, that you will some day be my wife—but—I love you!"

A sudden flame leaping up revealed Gertrude's face, on which neither confusion, agitation, pleasure, nor displeasure was depicted; nothing but the most intense and genuine astonishment. The flame dropped again; the room was nearly dark, and in the darkness the answer sounded clear and composed.

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Hamilton, for the compliment you pay me, and am sorry to pain you, but it cannot be."

She rose as she spoke as if to leave the room, but he detained her by an imploring gesture.

"One moment, Miss Manners. Is there no hope for me—have I offended you irrecoverably by my conceited folly?"

There was some amusement perceptible in the soft, distinct tones which answered:

"That has nothing to do with it. My vanity was hurt for a moment perhaps, but less hurt than if I had heard such a speech from a person whose opinion I valued."

There was a pause after this, and then he said meekly:

"At any rate you forgive me?"

"Quite," she answered, impatiently. "I am not a child, or a fool to bear malice for foolish words that were never intended to reach my ears." Then she added gently: "You have atoned for them sufficiently to satisfy the most unreasonable of women."

"But you have too poor an opinion of me ever to care for me?"

"No, I never said that," she answered, kindly. "I like you—I do, indeed—as an acquaintance; but ——"

The footman's entrance at this moment with the lamp put a summary stop to the interview, and Gertrude prudently avoided any possibility of its recurrence by walking out of the room.

One hot day in July, about six months later, three people were riding slowly up Hay Hill. Of these, one was Arthur Hamilton, the other two, Mr. and Mrs. Finsbury. The lady was as pretty and charming as ever, her husband stolid and somewhat bored, while Arthur wore his most listless London air, spoke in the most languid of tones, and appeared wholly unimpressed by his companion's smiles.

"Do you know who that is?" she said, as she bowed to a tall figure in black, who was coming down the hill.

"No," he answered, "I did not look at her."

"Do you remember Miss Manners, that plain girl who acted at Friar's Park, that you got into such a scrape with, and devoted yourself to afterwards by way of making up for it? It was wrong of you, for she might have taken your attentions for meaning more than they did: I don't suppose she is much accustomed to attention."

"Miss Manners! Yes, I remember her," he said; and something in his tone struck Mrs. Finsbury for the moment. She gave him a curious glance, but, reading nothing in his face, forgot it, and went on.

"She has just lost her father, poor girl. He was the only relation she had in the world, and he has left her penniless. She has some wild idea of going on the stage, which is foolish, as it does not follow that because a girl can act well in drawing-room theatricals she will ever make anything by it as a profession. However ——"

"I think I'll go and speak to her," Arthur broke in, with the sudden impetuosity which always contrasted so oddly with his assumed indifference to everything; and before Mrs. Finsbury and her husband could speak he had turned his horse and galloped down the hill. He caught Miss Manners up in Berkeley Square, had dismounted, and was at her side before she was aware of his vicinity. A faint tinge of colour rose to her cheeks as he spoke to her.

"I am so grieved to hear of your troubles," he began hurriedly, but with such genuine sympathy in his tones that the girl turned away her head to recover composure before answering him. Arthur had probably had no distinct idea in hurrying after her, except the pleasure of seeing her for a moment; but the sight of her emotion put to flight any remnants of sense or self-control that were left him. Without considering for a moment time, place, or circumstances, walking beside her with his bridle over his arm, he began ruthlessly:

"Miss Manners, it is eight months since I last saw you, and in all that time I have never ceased to think of you. I love you as much as ever: more than ever. Don't refuse to listen to me now. I cannot bear to think of your battling with the world alone. Gertrude, won't you give me the right to shield you from all future cares?"

Two pretty girls riding home to luncheon with their father, bowed graciously to Arthur at this moment, wondering at the vacant stare with which he received their salutations. They would have wondered

more could they have heard his conversation with "that plain girl in black."

For a moment Gertrude was silent, struggling with contending emotions. A sense of the absurdity of the thing, and a sense of pain together disposing her to be hysterical. She conquered it, though her eyes were filled with tears as she replied: "No, Mr. Hamilton; it cannot be. I do not love you."

"But you would learn to love me," he urged.

She shook her head. "It would be wrong. It is a temptation, for I am very lonely, but ——"

"Then marry me," he broke in eagerly. "I only ask for the right to devote myself to you. You would learn to love me. I will take the risk."

If only the fine ladies who ran after this fastidious young man and took such infinite pains to secure his favour could have heard him!

"No," said Gertrude. "It is not for these motives one should marry." Then she added, kindly: "You are worthy of a better fate than to be married for the sake of your money. I hope you will find it some day."

He looked for a moment into her face, and knew it was hopeless.

"Forgive me for having troubled you," he said. "Only if ever you need a friend, think of me. I shall always deem it a privilege to serve you, no matter in how small a way. Will you remember this?"

"I will remember," she answered softly. "Now, Good-bye."

"Will you come to the theatre to-night, Hamilton, and see this new star they are making such a fuss about?"

And Arthur, who was staying for a day or two with a friend in New York, expressed his willingness to go anywhere his host wished to take him. As they were leaving the house, one of the children came flying down the stairs.

"Mr. Hamilton, I have made you a buttonhole, please take it."

Arthur turned with a smile to the little maiden as she continued: "I have tied it up with blue ribbon, my doll's best hair-ribbon." Whereupon she produced an exquisite white rosebud and bit of fern, tied with a narrow piece of common ribbon. It was not an improvement to the bouquet, and had decidedly an odd appearance in Arthur's coat. But Arthur was no longer the languid dandy he had once been. Handsome as ever, and considerably improved by the sensible, manly manner that had taken the place of his former affectation of perpetual boredom, he was a greater favourite than ever with the fair sex, but they received little encouragement to pet him now. To children he was always kind, and never for a moment dreamt of hurting this child's feelings by rejecting the ribbon. He kissed the donor, and assured her he felt much flattered.

The theatre was hot and crowded. Arthur was tired from travelling
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and sight-seeing. He went to sleep directly he was in his seat, and was only aroused by the vociferous applause that greeted the star. He woke himself up to look at her, and at the first glance his heart stood still. She began to speak. There was no mistaking those clear, sweet tones, even under the trained stage intonation. It was indeed Gertrude, whom he had neither seen nor heard of since he had parted from her in Berkeley Square. Breathlessly he watched her every movement and listened to every word. She was a great actress, undoubtedly; she carried her audience with her in every emotion she portrayed. Her passion and fervour reduced them to tears one moment, at another her rippling laughter gladdened their hearts. Only Arthur neither laughed nor cried. To him she was not the heroine of the piece, whose vicissitudes of fortune he followed with eager interest. She was herself, the woman he loved; he did not know whether she were acting ill or well, hardly what words she was uttering. He only knew he was once more looking on the face, and listening to the voice that for five years had so persistently haunted his memory.

It was over. He could not tell whether she had seen him; indeed, till this moment, it had not occurred to him to wonder. Now, however, as in answer to repeated calls, she came before the curtain, he was seized with a wild desire to attract her attention. He took the little white rosebud out of his button-hole, and threw it to her. In vain. A bouquet fell at the same moment, and his poor little flower lay unobserved near the footlights.

"Well, my good friend, do you mean to come away to-night?" asked his companion. Arthur started, then, collecting himself, explained that the actress was a former acquaintance of his, and suggested going round to the stage-door to see her. "You would not be admitted; she is never to be found behind the scenes."

So Arthur was compelled to wait till the next day, when, procuring her address, he started off to see her. She was at home, and met him with a vivid blush and a nervous flutter that was most unusual to her. Their greeting was commonplace enough, and when her colour had faded, Arthur was not distracted by the exciting nature of the conversation, from observing how time had dealt with her. There were silver lines in her hair that had surely no business to be there, and lines on her face that told of weary struggles. But the green hazel eyes were soft and expressive as ever, and the play of countenance even more varied. But she had lost her cool self-possession, a circumstance he remarked, and attributed to the same wear and tear that had lined her face and touched her hair with grey.

"May I congratulate you," he said, presently, "on the success you have achieved?"

She smiled a little sadly. "Yes, I suppose I have succeeded; but —"

"But what?"

"But nothing. I was going to moralise on the emptiness of fame, only I thought better of it."

"Does it not satisfy you?" he said.

"Does anything in life ever quite satisfy?" she returned, smiling.

"But—but—am I impertinent to ask?—Are you happy?" She crimsoned, and he hastily added: "I mean—perhaps—you want—I mean ——" and he floundered hopelessly.

"I don't want anything," she replied, quietly. "I never have wanted anything. Whenever I have been in trouble I have found kind friends."

"And I cannot help you in any way? Ah, no: if you found friends when you were in trouble, you will not want for them now you have attained fame. But if you ever should—— Do you remember what I said to you once?"

"I remember," she returned, in a low voice.

"I am not going to torment you by repeating all that again, but ——" A sudden gesture on her part here passed unnoticed, for his eyes were fixed on the carpet. "Only if you ever want a friend, I am ready now as I was then. Good-bye, Miss Manners."

"Good-bye," she replied, very quietly, too much accustomed, perhaps, to his sudden impulses to wonder at this abrupt departure.

But, as he turned away, not looking where he was going, he knocked over a small table that stood near; and all the small nick-nacks upon it went rolling in different directions.

"I am so sorry," he said, as he stooped to pick them up. A little sandelwood carved box lay at his feet, and, in taking it up, he touched the spring. It flew open. Inside it lay a faded white rosebud, tied with a bit of blue ribbon. For a moment he stood bewildered. Then a great joy came over his face. He looked at her. With downcast eyes and crimson cheeks she stood silent and trembling. Down fell box and rosebud to the floor again.

"Gertrude! my Gertrude, at last!"

"Yes, I love you now," she confessed, a little time after. "I think I began to love you the moment you left my side that day in Berkeley Square, when I began to realise what I had lost. And, oh, Arthur! I am so tired of fame, and of rehearsing and acting, applause and bouquets, and all the excitement and weariness of it. Take me away from it all, Arthur."

Which he was quite ready to do at the earliest opportunity.



GEORGE CONSIDINE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE GHOST OF ALDRUM HALL."

"BY the way, Jack, you have never told me how it was that George Considine left the army. Hadn't he a disappointment, or something of that sort?"

We were sitting together, my brother and I, in the old-fashioned oak-panelled coffee-room of the Hook and Hatchet, at Remhurst, our hunting quarters in the year of grace, '73, enjoying the pleasant warmth of a genuine wood fire, and a bottle of our landlord's '47—very good it was, too—after a long, hard day with the West Dartshire hounds.

"Ah, that is rather a long story and a sad one," answered Jack gravely, refilling my glass and his own, whilst I composed myself to listen to the following narrative:—

"He was a great chum of mine," began Jack, "when we were at Sandhurst together. I met him first at Raeford, that summer you went abroad with my father. He and I, poor Wentworth, and two or three other lads were staying down in the holidays. He first met Mary Laborde there. She, too, was staying at Raeford. Lady Lanchester was her aunt, or cousin, I forget which, and Considine fell desperately in love with her after a boyish fashion: he was about fourteen, I suppose, at the time.

"After that visit I don't think Considine saw much of his lady love until he came of age. He asked me to the ball they gave there, and had no eyes for anyone but Miss Laborde, so I was not surprised when he told me, a month later, that they were engaged. Beautiful? Ay, she was, and she made many an honest heart ache, too.

"Well, Considine and I went out to India soon after, as you know. Of course his people would not hear of his taking a wife with him; in fact, I believe they did not altogether like the engagement. I lost sight of him for two or three years; he was a shockingly bad correspondent, and the only letter I ever had from him, about six months after our arrival out there, contained nothing in the world but a description of a pony he and another fellow had bought, and some rather strong language relative to mosquitos. I answered the interesting despatch, and then the correspondence dropped.

"About three years after, you know I was ordered home invalided, and the first person I met on board the *City of Edinburgh* was Considine, looking as if I had parted with him but the day before. He nursed me during that voyage as you would have done, Charlie, and when I got a little better, and condescended to take some interest in my fellow-creatures, he told me how it was we chanced to meet again on our homeward way.

"He was still engaged, and had kept up a regular correspondence with Miss Laborde during those three years. Her last letter had brought him news of her mother's death. 'So I'm going home to be married, old fellow. She is left without a penny in the world,' he said to me. 'How on earth Mrs. Laborde contrived to live in the style she did, goodness only knows. But I have enough with Marston, and she shall never know what poverty is in the future, if I can help it.'

"He asked me to be his best man at the wedding, and his last words, as we parted at Paddington—he was going straight down to Raeford—were, 'I'll write and let you know all about it, Jack. Keep yourself in readiness to come and do your duty by me; you mustn't fail me, you know.' I answered him jokingly, and he ran off to his train. I went down to Paddington next morning to meet a servant—a lad they were sending up to me from Aldrum; and standing on the platform watching the Birmingham train draw up and empty itself, I caught sight of the back of a slight, familiar figure in a grey suit, getting out of a smoking carriage, and I ran up and laid my hand on Considine's shoulder. 'Didn't expect to see you back so soon, old fellow. Nothing wrong, I hope. Where are you going?' 'To the devil, I think,' he said, under his breath, and trying to shake my hand off. I just glanced at him, and knew what was the matter. He had his portmanteau in his hand, and was striding off towards the cab-stand as he spoke. I followed him, and put my arm through his. 'Pon my word, Considine, I'm awfully sorry. Come home with me, will you? It will be better than going to the club; my rooms are quiet.' 'No,' he answered, savagely, 'hanged if I do!' but he jumped into a cab, giving the fellow no answer when he asked where to drive; so I gave him my address, and Considine muttered a 'Thanks, Kenyon,' as I sat down beside him. He looked wretchedly ill and exhausted, and suspecting that he had not breakfasted, I made him have something when we reached home. Afterwards he said he was going down to his place at Marston, if I would go with him; they could easily get a couple of beds ready for us, and he thought there was some shooting.

"I had nothing particular to keep me in town just then. I saw Considine really desired my company, so I consented to go with him. His father had been dead some eighteen months, and his mother was abroad at some German baths for her health; the house at Marston was shut up and left in the charge of the housekeeper and a couple of maidservants. We telegraphed, giving them about an hour's notice, and then collected our traps and ran down by the four express.

"Marston Magna is a small out-of-the-world village, hidden down among the miry lanes and deep clayey hollows of South Meadshire, and the Grange, Considine's place, is little more than a shooting-box; a quaint, many-gabled, grey stone house, standing on a little platform of green turf, and surrounded on three sides by a belt of Scotch firs,

and a wide moat. Set in a dark background of trees, the place has a damp and somewhat dreary look. Passing through the line of white mist that rose on either hand from the weedy, stagnant water that autumn evening, gave one a curiously uncomfortable sensation, as of stepping into some undiscovered region of gloom.

"At night, after we had dined together, and were smoking in sober silence by the fire, I looked up suddenly and saw the keen, quiet eyes fixed on me. Considine put down his cigar, and spoke. 'I should like to tell you all about it, Jack,' he said, in his usual tone. 'I'm afraid I made rather a fool of myself this morning and was rude to you.'—I interrupted him with a gesture of dissent.—'I beg your pardon, if I were so,' he went on. 'But I was in a cursed temper: it's all over now; I only feel like a fellow awakened out of a pleasant dream a little too roughly.'

"He paused a moment or two; I thought I ought to speak, but I didn't in the least know what to say. So I held my tongue, and Considine began his story quietly, with his usual dry and composed manner.

"'I had no misgivings whatever when I started on my journey to Raeford last evening, though I had neither written nor telegraphed to—to them to expect me; meaning, you know, to take them by surprise. I did not reach Raeford until rather late—it was getting dusk, in fact: you know the arrangement on that South East line—if you are in a hurry you had better get out and walk. The Hall is only half a mile from the station, and I left my portmanteau in the cloak-room and walked up. Of course no one at the house knew me, and I would not send in my name. I asked for Miss Laborde, and the fellow showed me into the library—I don't think he knew who was there. There were two solitary candles burning on the table, and looking dim and yellow in the ruddy glow of the fire that went blazing up the wide chimney. I went towards it, not seeing that there was anyone in the room. She stood in that little west window, Jack, half hidden by the crimson curtain, and with her back to me; but there was the sleeve of a brown shooting coat round her waist, and both her white hands rested on his shoulders. I saw at a glance who it was—Tom Thornhill, the richest and most finished fool in all Blankshire. I suppose I must have made some exclamation, for they both turned round with a start—they had not heard me enter or cross the room. She, Mary, knew me, and gave a little, half-inaudible cry, covering her face with both hands. I believe she must have thought she saw my ghost for a moment; Thornhill stared stupidly, twisting the end of his moustache. 'I am sorry to have intruded upon you, Miss Laborde; I see I was presuming too far on my welcome. I should have asked permission to come,' I said; rather brutally, I'm afraid. She raised her head. 'You have not had my letter, George! oh, forgive me! but how could I know you had not had it?'—'I received no letter since that one you wrote in June,'"

I interrupted. "I wrote to you to—explain; I wrote last—oh, long ago," she cried out. Jack, I knew it was a lie, but how could I say so? I bowed, and said I was sorry not to have had the letter; it would have prevented this contretemps; but I needed no further explanation, and I wished—she broke in haughtily: "It is not my fault, Captain Considine, that you did not receive my letter. I, too, am sorry; most grieved; but I did what I thought right in writing to ask you to release me from my engagement: it is a mistake, better for both our sakes, forgotten." I believe I said something I ought not to have done about a woman's faith; she drew back, flushing angrily. "I have been very wrong, I know," she said, "but I could not help it; I could not help it; I have been forced to do things against my better judgment: you must forgive me, George." She looked so beautiful, Kenyon, as she stood there by his side, her eyes brimming over with tears, her face a little flushed, and her white hand held out to me! I did forgive her, I think; but I couldn't take that hand: it was mine no longer, though God knows I could have died to call it mine one moment, even then.'

"Considine paused a second or two, turning his head away from the light.

"'She vowed she loved me—vowed to be true to me till death,' he went on, at last. 'But perhaps it's not in the nature of woman to be true to a man with only fifteen hundred acres and half pay, when an estate of three thousand and a title are laid at their feet. What more was there to say or do? I came away, leaving them together, my lost love and that—fellow. I have seen her face for the last time, Jack—don't interrupt me. The seven train had been gone half an hour when I got back to the station, and I had to stay at the Railway Inn all night and come up to town this morning. I would sooner have met you, old fellow, than anyone, just then. You know all there is to tell now. It is like you to have listened so patiently.'

"I held out my hand. Considine wrung it heartily, and then turned to light a cigar, and sat silent for the rest of the evening.

"Perhaps no one less intimately acquainted with him than I was would have guessed how crushing the blow had been. His very determination to tell me the story; a story which, by the way, most men would have shrunk from laying before a friend; and his quiet and composed manner of telling it, only gave me a deeper insight into the strength of the love and faith that had been so cruelly betrayed. Somehow I felt that, with fortune good or bad, George Considine would never be the same man again.

"The next few days dragged out a slow length in long stretches of dismal fog, or still more dismal small rain. But in spite of the weather Considine and I plodded silently over acres and acres of stubble every morning for hours, and with little regard for future seasons, killing anything up shamelessly. But the long days in the open air and the simple living did me a world of good, together with the nursing

and petting Considine's old housekeeper lavished upon me. She ordered us both about as if we had been lads of twelve or fourteen, and used to appear at all hours of the day and night that we spent indoors, with dry socks, comforters, strengthening jelly, or some concoction of the kind.

"With renewed health and plenty of good sport the days were still long and dull, and I should not have been sorry to get back to town at the end of a week, but for Considine. He was terribly down at times, and I had determined to stand by him as long as he wanted me. It was worst in the evening when, after dinner, we had drawn our chairs to the fire over wine and walnuts, he would not talk or smoke or play *écarté*.

"The Grange was fully half a mile from the village, and the clergyman, an old bachelor with a gouty foot, the only inhabitant with whom Considine was on visiting terms. More than one evening at that time, he sat until he had emptied the decanter and—but you will understand; I need only touch upon the subject. I said nothing at first, but the third time it happened I thought I ought to interfere, and I got up and put the wine away. He half rose, with an angry word. I went round to him and laid my hand on his shoulder. 'Excuse me, old fellow, but I can't see you do that. It won't help you, you know. The man who thinks to drown trouble so, is ——'

"'A fool—you're right about that, Jack,' he put in. 'Thank you, for reminding me; but the temptation's strong, when there's nothing left worth living for, to make as short work of it as possible.'

"I believe I lectured him about duty and so forth, and he took it all in good part: spite of his faults, he was a good-hearted fellow was Considine, and he never transgressed again while we were alone. For the rest, the sin, I am persuaded, will not be at his door. Of course it was a great mistake, his leaving the army, and I told him so, over and over again. It was no use; he sent in his papers and the thing was done.

"One day we were tramping homewards from an out-lying farm, after a hard morning's work and not much sport, the birds were getting wild—when a rattle of wheels and a sudden shout warned us to step out of the way. I turned round to see a well-appointed tandem driven by a tall fellow in a mackintosh, and before I had time to wonder what brought him there he had pulled up, and his groom was at the leader's head.

"'Hallo, Considine,' he called out, 'I was just coming to call upon you. Heard yesterday you were down here. How do?'

"'St. Just, by Jove!'

"It struck me that Considine's exclamation betrayed more surprise than pleasure. However, he returned the greeting cordially enough, and introduced me. I had heard of this Colonel St. Just before, and knew a little about him: enough, in fact, to make me rather curious to see him. Yes, one of the St. Justs of La Fontaine; he was a younger son, but very well off. He was in the Crimea, and wounded

at Sebastopol. A man about middle age, I should say, tall and very slight, with a delicate, high-bred face, fair and smooth as a woman's, and with a woman's sweetness of expression. The smile with which he raised his hat to me was, I think, the most winning I ever saw. I made these observations while Considine was talking to him, or, more correctly, answering questions. An invitation to dinner was given then. 'Come to-morrow at seven. We dine early. I have several young fellows staying with me, and I have to be careful of their morals, you know; and bring your friend—I beg your pardon, Captain Kenyon, did you say? I hope you will give me the pleasure of your company, Captain Kenyon, though I am afraid you will find it rather slow after Indian gaieties.'

"I accepted. With a good deal of shouting at the horses, and 'Good nights' exchanged, they dashed off into the gathering mist.

"I didn't know St. Just was a friend of yours, George,' I said, as we shouldered our guns and plodded on again.

"Oh, I have met him two or three times; I don't know him very well,' he answered, with some reserve, remarking presently that he wished he had not accepted the invitation; he supposed all the other fellows knew about it.

"Dare say they do; but you must face that.'

"Suppose so, unless I break my neck first,' he answered, with a bitter laugh.

"Walford, St. Just's place, was some three miles from Marston; a comparatively new house, and furnished in that high-art style which was just beginning to come into fashion among a few enthusiasts in the æsthetic world. The dinner and wines were superb, and the other guests pleasant and gentlemanly enough: a few young officers—not one of whom, however, Considine or I knew; one or two Oxford men, Colonel Dixon of the 61st, a barrister, and old Squire Harwood, of Wixhope.

"The conversation savoured rather of the stable at first, but there was not much harm in it. It was St. Just himself who gave to it a tone I did not altogether like—a covert sneer now and then at things no gentleman should sneer at—an imputation of wrong motive where none should have been imputed—a joke which a man would hardly have cared to repeat to his sister. More than once, I must confess, I felt a little annoyed; still, I could not help watching my host with more interest and admiration than is usually excited by a total stranger on the mind of a man with an amazingly good opinion of himself. The fair, handsome face, with its winning smile; the rich, deep voice, never raised above a certain pitch—he set the whole table in a roar and turned to swear at the servants in precisely the same low, grave tones—yet so clear that no word could escape you; and the graceful, polished manner, fascinated me in spite of myself. I couldn't keep my eyes off him, and yet I was glad when dinner was over, and we went to the billiard and smoking rooms.

"After a good deal of persuasion, Considine sat down at the card-table with Colonel Dixon. I did not care to play, and, pleading a slight headache as an excuse, took my cigar to a window-seat, with a view of making further observations. St. Just himself would not play, but walked about from one room to another, marking for billiards or looking over the hands of the half-dozen who were at cards. He seemed to me to exercise the same singular fascination over all his guests, the young fellows especially. More than one lad I saw colour and start like a girl when the white hand rested on his shoulder, and the handsome head bent down over him.

"I got Considine away tolerably early, but not before he had pledged himself to dine there the following night; and hearing this, I, too, accepted the invitation, which of course was extended to me.

"The evening passed off in much the same way as the previous one had done, but that there was some high play. More than enough wine had been drunk before we left, and—well, I had to drive Considine home. I was more grieved and annoyed about it than I can tell you, and none the less so that I knew whose doing it was. St. Just played his part of tempter carefully and with infinite tact; but it was he, I knew, who had filled Considine's glass again and again, and proposed the higher stakes; and when George grew excited and angry through the quiet rebuke his host gave him, I had seen a gleam of something like satisfaction—a look in the grey eyes that startled me for a moment, and the recollection of which cost my friend a lecture next morning. He listened in moody silence to what I had to say until I concluded.

"'If you are wise, old fellow, you will break with St. Just and his set. You know as well as I do that they are no good. We saw enough last night to give us a fair idea of what goes on there. Why not go abroad and stay with your mother a few weeks? I believe it would do you good.'

"He faced round on me at that.

"'Thanks, Jack; but I believe I am old enough to choose my own friends and place of residence. I'm sorry if they don't suit you; but the remedy lies in your own hands.'

"I would not have borne the insult from any other man, Charlie; but I could not quarrel with Considine. I looked at him steadily for a moment, waiting for an apology; and when his eyes met mine, he came to me, holding out his hand.

"'I beg pardon, Jack. I didn't mean that; but you must let me go to the deuce my own way.'

"'There is no necessity for your going there at all, that I know of,' I answered, laughing. 'And you will send an excuse instead of going over to Walford to-day, eh?'

"'Hang it, a fellow must have something to do, and there is capital cover-shooting in the park,' he said shortly, and with a slight frown.

"'Never mind the shooting, old fellow; do what you know to be right.'

"'I don't know it to be right; and, 'pon my word, I will not be preached at, Jack. If you don't care to go, I'll take your excuses.'

"He rang the bell, and ordered the dog-cart; and seeing that he was bent on having his own way, I said no more, and I went with him too, after a tough battle with my confounded pride. Leave him to himself just then I could not, and call myself his friend.

"I have since understood better the object St. Just had in view in asking us to Walford. It was said, on very good authority, I believe, that more than one large estate in the county belonged to him, and had he chosen to lay claim to them the nominal owners would have inevitably come to grief. Scarcely one of his friends was not over head and ears in debt to him, and Considine's little place of fifteen hundred acres at Marston was perhaps more of a Naboth's vineyard to his neighbour than he was at all aware of. Moreover, the fellow had such an extraordinary love of and desire for power that he would spare no thought or trouble to bring a young man under his influence whether he had money or not. And not alone those of his own station. This extreme courtesy of manner, and this pleasant word and smile, that achieved to some extent his end with his inferiors, he never seemed to forget; and, though hard and stern in his dealings with his tenants, no man was more popular among the village people. His very grooms and stablemen watched for a look from him, and worshipped, if they feared him.

"I was not altogether pleased to find, when he came in to dinner that night, that St. Just had sent for our things, and we were booked to spend a week there. He came up to me in the gun-room with a courteous word or two. 'He had induced Considine to spend a few days with him, just for the pheasant shooting—would I give him the pleasure of my company? Considine's friends were his—I must stay,' and so forth.

"I should like to have knocked him down, Charlie; but all I could do was to accept the invitation rather awkwardly, and resolve to get George away as soon as possible. He was standing by the window, and I went up to him.

"'You are going to stay, of course,' he said to me, rather shortly.

"I answered him with a touch of coolness, and, seeing he was in no mood to be reasoned with, left him alone. I wish now I had not done so. There were some wild things said and done that night, and I know Considine lost a lot of money—more than he could afford to do, by a long shot. I had to look on, fret and fume inwardly, and curse the winning smile and voice that were luring him on to destruction.

"My dear fellow, I tell you until you experienced it you could not understand how strong a fascination there was in St. Just's manner

to a man younger than himself, and to whom his notice was—well, a little flattering. He came up to me in the course of the evening, confound him, and complimented me on my long distances and one or two lucky double shots; and, spite of my indignation and disgust at the part he was playing, I couldn't help feeling his half-dozen well-bred, polished sentences were worth a whole chapter of praise from any other man. Well, he was a brave soldier, and served his country nobly. God forgive him the ill he wrought to my friend.

"'Considine seems to be playing rather recklessly to-night; perhaps it might be as well to give him a hint to-morrow,' he said to me, glancing over his shoulder at George's flushed face. My blood was up, and I answered him hotly.

"'I should think the hint would come best from yourself, sir.'

"He turned away with a courteous 'Perhaps so,' that was in itself the most cutting rebuke I ever had; but, assuming that I was right, he took very good care that I should have no opportunity of giving the hint next day, and I made one for myself by following George to his room, when he went to dress for dinner. I was admitted, not with very good grace, however, and I plunged into the subject straight away.

"'Look here, old fellow, if you mean to stay here, I don't.'

"He sat down on the bed and stared at me.

"'Very well. Sorry this place doesn't suit you. Shall you go up to town?'

"'No; I don't mean that, George. You know what I want to say. Let us cut the concern; we have neither of us any business here.'

"'I don't know what right you have to dictate to me in the matter, Kenyon.' He spoke haughtily, and I answered him in the same tone.

"'I have a right; you are my friend. I have never proved myself otherwise, have I?'

"'No.'

"'You must know how disagreeable it is to me to have to speak on this subject; but 'pon my honour, Considine, I can't help it. I can't see you go to the deuce without——'

"He interrupted me with a sneer. 'I am much obliged; I didn't know I was so far on the road to destruction that my friends could tell me to my face that I was going to the deuce.'

"I saw the mistake I had made, and did what I could to repair it. 'I beg your pardon, George. I shouldn't have said that, but what is the use mincing the matter? You know this is not a good house for a young fellow to be in. I know no reason why you and I should stay.'

"'I have remarked before, I believe, Kenyon, that there is no reason why you should not go if you don't like it. I suppose I can take care of myself under any circumstances, and I mean to avail myself of St. Just's invitation.'

"He got up and rang for hot water. I knew, blundering fool that I was, that I had overshot my mark. One more effort I made.

"I think you owe me an apology for that speech, Considine; but I don't want to quarrel. I have only spoken because we are friends, and I'm sorry you can't take my warning as I meant it."

"Don't say any more: we shall understand each other better in future, I hope."

"I hope so," I said, and took my departure. "My wounded feelings would have induced me to act upon his suggestion and go straight back to town, but for the memory of that voyage home, and the almost womanly tenderness with which he had nursed a confoundedly irritable invalid. After that evening, I began to have a suspicion that he had gone too far to retreat, and that he couldn't have broken with St. Just if he would; but why it was that he refused me his confidence, I do not know. I'm afraid I was too calmly superior and self-righteous in my well-meant warnings. Ah! among the sins and follies of youth a man has to repent of, the memory of his beggarly little virtues is sometimes the bitterest.

"Our little difference seemed to have been forgotten next day, and Considine spoke to me in his usual manner. I did not see much of him though, and it went on for several days. But I will not trouble you with the details. I don't know if Considine lost much more money. I fancy not; but he never went to bed sober; and of all the wild, reckless set gathered in the smoking-room at Walford every night, he was the wildest and most reckless.

"The hunting season began. St. Just offered to mount us both, and we stayed on. I was more determined than ever not to go without Considine, and though very well aware that my host had had enough of my company, I ignored the fact, and received his cool courtesies with the best grace I could.

"You know the sort of hunting country it is down in Meadshire—small fields, high hedges, very little grassland, and covers all close together—not the best place in the world for a forty minutes' run; and yet the South Meadshire hounds always came out first at the end of a season, and St. Just declared he would not change his quarters for anything. He himself rode well; a bit recklessly, perhaps, but I never want to see a better man across country. His stud was, taking it altogether, the best lot of horses I ever saw in any meeting stables; and Considine and I were well mounted.

"A good, bold horseman George always was, but his wild daring of those days made some of the hardest riders in the field hold their breath and shout a warning that was lost in the gallant rush of the little Irish hunter he rode to his fence. Two horses he completely knocked up in as many days, and even St. Just remonstrated. Considine pulled in a little, and I began to hope that after all we might escape without further mischief worked; but he so persistently avoided having anything to say to me in private, I

could not again introduce the subject of our leaving, save in the presence of others—and that I did not choose to do.

"I think we must have been there something like ten days before the — end came. Considine had a letter that morning; I don't know from whom, or anything of the contents; I never did know, for he burnt it almost at once; but the writing was a lady's, and I saw his whole face darken as he read it, saw him hand it to St. Just with a little laugh and sneer, and realized, perhaps, for the first time, that I had already lost the George Considine who was once my friend.

"I took a heavy heart with me to cover-side that morning, Charlie. The hounds met at Walford, and found at Deepdene; the fox broke cover, and went away for Weston—a good run? Ay, I think it was the best I ever had, and longer by twenty minutes than the one to-day. A burning scent, breast high, and not a check all along. The pace the first two or three miles left all the stragglers behind, and the rest of us settled down into our saddles, and hardened our hearts. It was worth a man's while to live for such a morning as that. A soft, south wind and cloudy sky, a good horse under you, answering gallantly to voice and hand, the hounds on well ahead, close together as they could run, and far in the distance, widening in the long, steady stride of a race for life, the dark speck you knew to be the best old dog-fox of the season.

"Considine kept on my left hand as we went up Longbrook Valley. He was riding a clever little mare of St. Just's, a chestnut with a vile temper, which she displayed at her fences pretty frequently. Considine lost *his* temper once or twice; but he managed to get his own way with the little brute, and was in the first flight when the fox was headed and turned west again over the Wixhope common.

"My horse was getting a little winded then, and I knew I must ride carefully if I wished to see anything of the finish. Considine passed me. His mare had cooled down, and was going splendidly with a free yet steady gallop that left many a veteran in the rear. The pace increased as we neared the edge of the common and caught sight of Wixhope village, lying in the hollow, and the blue smoke wreaths curling up into the misty sunlight that had struggled through the bank of grey cloud above it. Down at the brook we left more than one good horse and rider—over a grass-field or two, through old Dobbs' farm-yard, we held on like grim Death, till a stiffer fence than any we had yet left behind made the best of us look to our girths and harden our hearts. I was no light weight at that time, and had some doubts as to whether my horse would do it; but a closer view showed me the ground was sound and there was nothing much of a drop, and I gave him his head. A warning shout rang in my ears: 'Hold hard, sir! not there—a bit higher up.' But my horse cleared it, fell, and recovered himself before I turned round in my saddle to glance behind.

"Some fifty yards lower down there was a tremendous drop, a wide, deep ditch, and bit of boggy ground, altogether the nastiest place you can imagine, and there Considine had jumped. He must have been mad to attempt it with a horse a bit tired. I suppose the mare cleared it, though, for she lay on the bank beyond the ditch. I saw his fair head down on the wet, red clay, a flashing out of white heels, as the mare struggled and got up, and I knew there was something awfully wrong.

"I believe I was the first to reach him ; but, ere I could speak, half a dozen flasks were thrust into my hand, and half a dozen dismayed faces bending over the still, slight figure. St. Just's voice stilled the momentary confusion. 'Is that you, Forbes? come here. Stand back, please, gentlemen. It is fortunate that we have a doctor at hand.'

"Some of them moved away, and Forbes, the Wixhope surgeon, strode up. A big, rough-looking fellow he was, with the voice and touch of a woman. I knelt, with George's head on my arm, while he went to work. He looked up at me in a minute or two, and shook his head. 'Can't do anything ; he is dying. No, don't try to move him ; it will not last long.'

"Something else he said ; but I neither heard nor heeded more. They moved still farther away, the other fellows, and stood staring at each other in silence and dismay. I think St. Just was beside me ; I heard him speak to the doctor once or twice, but I hadn't a thought to give him. I saw nothing but the white face upturned to the dull grey sky, and the crushed, motionless figure that blast of horn or ring of horse-hoofs would never wake to life and vigour again.

"I have always been thankful, Charlie, that there was a momentary interval of consciousness before the end came. I felt a slight pressure from the hand in mine. Considine opened his eyes. I had to bend down very low to catch the broken words, and St. Just, with instinctive courtesy, moved away, a look on his face I had never seen before. If his remorse and sorrow were but a passing feeling then, I know that when his own time came to die, George Considine's name was the last on his lips.

"'I'm done for, Jack,' he muttered brokenly. 'I had always hoped to die in battle ; this is almost as good—eh? Tell—tell her—is that her little hand in mine?—No, no, I tell you, St. Just!' He tried to raise himself. 'Gone away! is it? What does he say? Ware wheat, gentlemen, ware wheat! Out of the way there—steady, lad—steady —'

"It was a death no man need fear to die, Charlie, out under the quiet sky, the green fields round, your head on mother Earth ; hushed, friendly voices you will never hear again floating in on your dulled senses, and some strong, faithful hand holding yours till the last. Considine died peacefully, as a brave man should, a smile on

his lips, and his eyes still seeking mine even in the little struggle which, thank God, did not last long."

"Yes, yes, they ran to earth at Austey Wood, and found again there. This wine is rather muddy, eh, old fellow?"

Was it?—or were the keen, dark eyes—that a few weeks back had faced death so calmly, measuring distances so well, in the hand-to-hand encounter with a dozen desperate foes, and Major Kenyon, fighting his way back to his men, had won his Victoria Cross—were they filled with tears?



SONG.

Dost thou love me?—Oh, no, no,
Love is not like this!

Some may come and love may go,
Fading as a wreath of snow—

Fleeting as a kiss!

Love is not a thing for ever,
Twining nearer, changing never.

Clasp it for a happy minute,
Lightly dream it is thine own;

Taste the joy that flutters in it,

Clasp it closer, it is gone!

Dost thou love me? No, no.

Ah! no, no.

Dost thou love me? Yes! ah, yes,

With a changeless faith;

Eager as a saint to bless,

Fond as mother's first caress,

Resolute as death!

This is love, the true ideal,

Love that *thou* hast made the real,

This is love, the old, old story,

Sunlight of the heart and eye,

Filling earth and sky with glory;

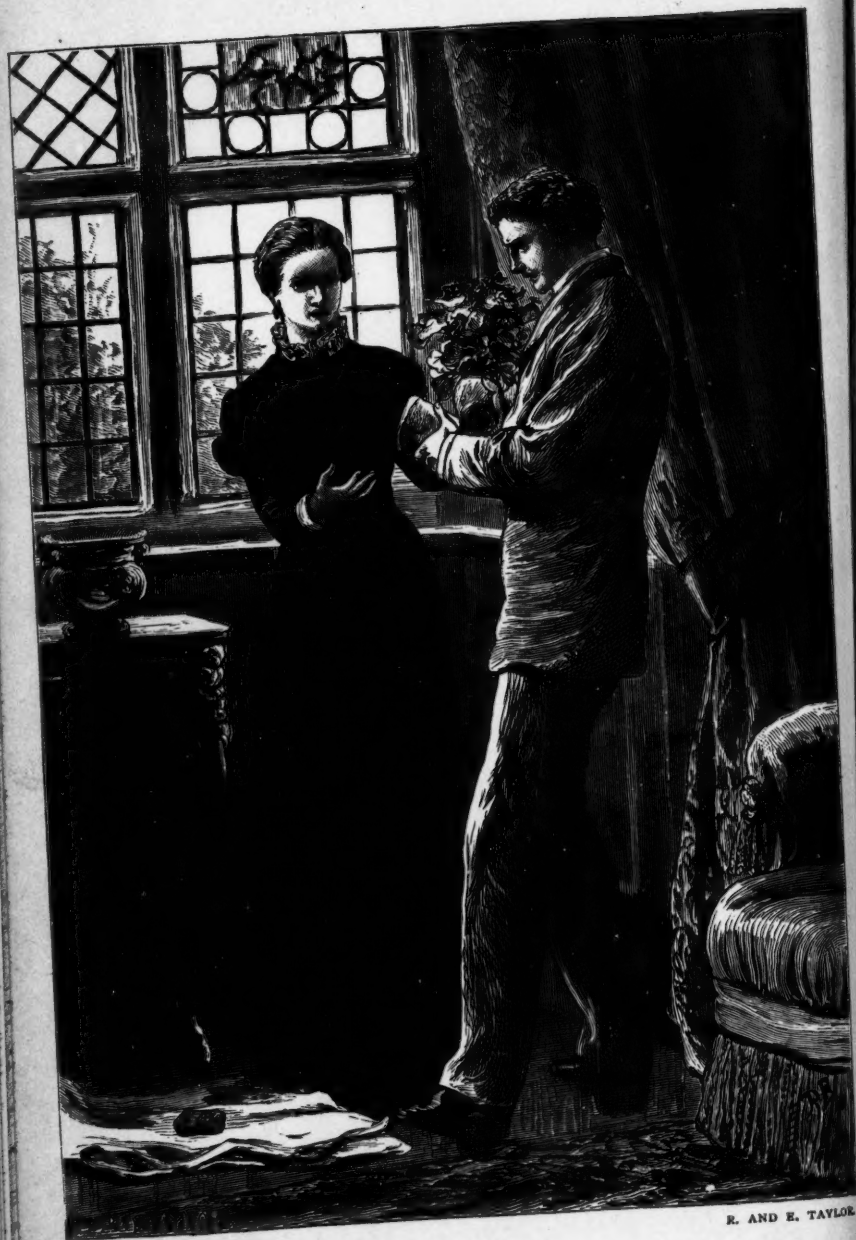
Happy earth and happy sky!

Dost thou love me? Yes! ah, yes,

Ah! yes, yes!

E. A. H.

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ROBERT BARNES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE BLUE-RIMMED JAR.